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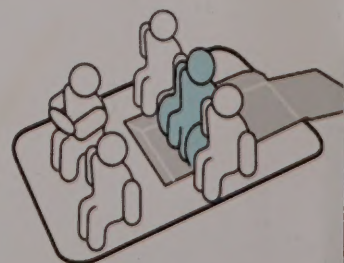
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editorial

A long road to freedom

Article 19 of the UN convention on the rights of disabled people enshrines the right to independent living. When set out baldly, the theory of independent living reads like motherhood and apple pie.

It states that, as disabled people we have the right to live where we choose, the assumption being that we would choose to live in our own home in our home community, surrounded by family, friends and neighbours.

A further assumption is that we'd require, and be provided with the support to enable us to do this with our access and other personal needs fully met.

And the lives that this would enable us to live would therefore be not just fully integrated, but also determined by our own choices: choices about when and what we eat, when we sleep and get out of bed, which leisure activities we pursue, whether, if we're able, we choose to go to work and if

paid employment is not an option, that is clearly acknowledged and understood and we have access to alternative means of financial support.

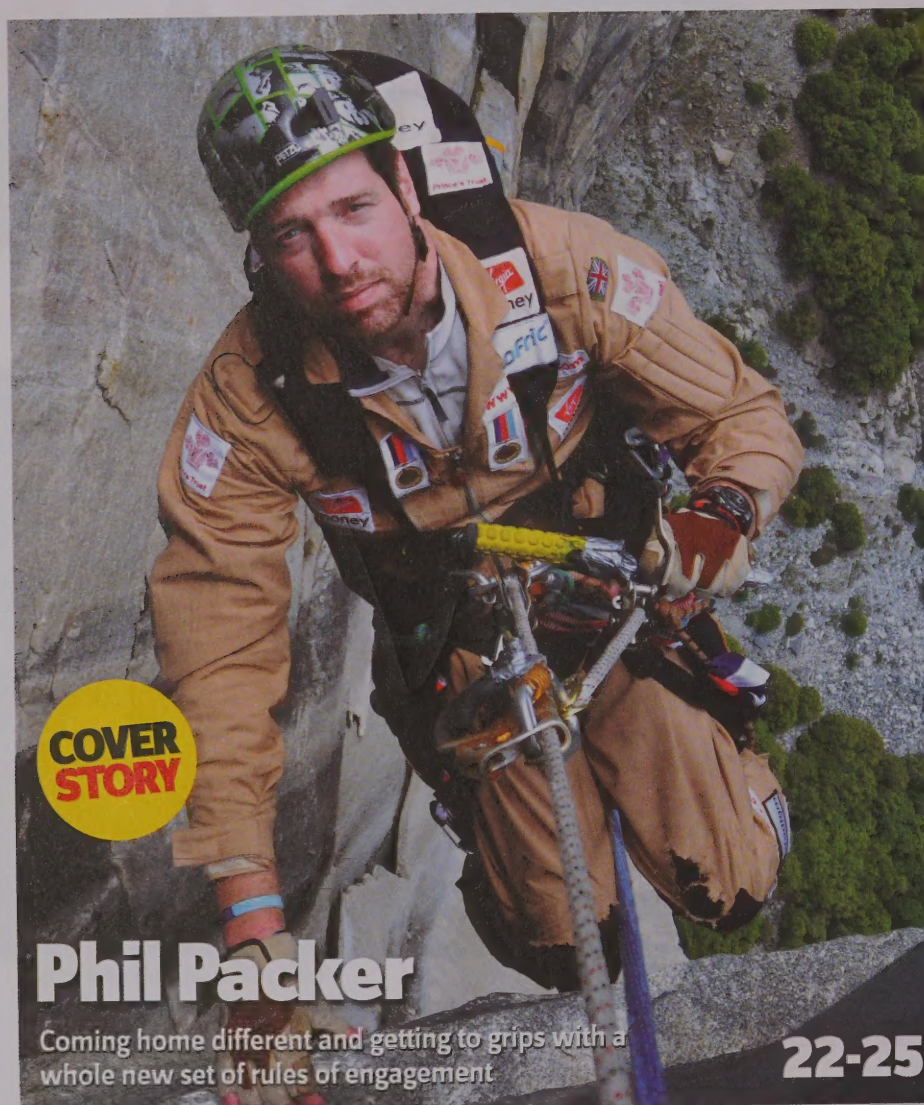
These rights, assumptions and that sort of provision are tacitly accepted in current thinking on care and support provision by government and in the thinking of some of the larger providers of services. All the talk is of personalisation and individual budgets.

But for many people, the reality of that sort of life is about as far removed from how they actually live as Oz is from the real world.

People don't choose, but are put to bed at five in the evening because that's when carers can do it or think they should go; regardless of choice and preference, hot food is served when others think it's appropriate; young people are sent to live in facilities geared towards the needs of older residents. For too many, the road to independence seems too long.

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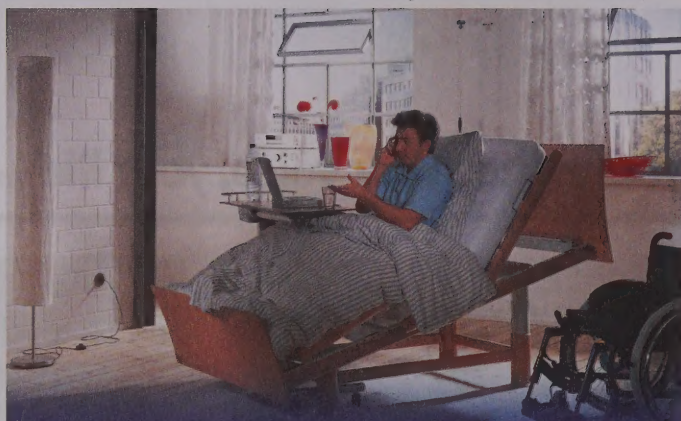


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newsview

New role for Smith at Equality Commission

As he moves up from the Disability Committee to full commissioner status with the Equality and Human Rights Commission, Mike Smith (*pictured*) tells **Ian Macrae** how what's been wrong in the past will be put right now

There's a sense in which it feels like the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) has taken a big deep breath and is starting all over again.

And there are many who'd argue that that's precisely what needs to happen, in particular on its approach to disability.

Among the newly appointed commissioners is Mike Smith, founder member of the Commission's Disability Committee and, externally, chair of the National Centre for Independent Living (NCIL).

His appointment, and that of other new commissioners, is a reaction to the resignations (some would say a filling of the void left by them).

The EHRC prefers to say it chose not to seek reappointments of former commissioners including Baroness (Jane) Campbell and Sir Bert Massey.

"I don't think it's appropriate for me to comment on the specifics of what's happened in the past," says Smith.

By no means does he present himself as a new broom. He's keen both to



acknowledge where the previous focus may have been wrong but also to accentuate the positive.

"The Commission has done a huge amount of work on disability stuff. When you look at the legal cases we brought in in the first year, nearly half of them were disability related.

"But the issue where we recognise we haven't been as good as we could have been is at stakeholder engagement."

In explaining what that might mean, he takes the opportunity of underlining his own credibility in the disabled community.

"One thing I particularly want to support is reaching out and doing more partnership work across the range of disability stakeholders.

"I've been involved in disability rights for the last ten years in London and I'm chair of NCIL. I totally get the importance of disabled people's organisations and

the role they play in linking up big organisations like us and individual disabled people."

Smith is talking to *Disability Now* on the day the EHRC launches an enquiry into what it calls the "harassment" of disabled people.

With the scope and terms of reference of the enquiry still to be hammered out, was it a strategic decision not to have it look specifically into disability hate crime?

"We deliberately widened it. Hate crime is a buzzword. Just as damaging can be the drip-drip effect of what police and other authorities might term, unfortunately, low-level crime, and it's important to us to cover that whole spectrum."

Asked if the enquiry is likely to result in prosecutions, Smith shows another side of himself: the legal eagle.

"You can't pre-determine the absolute outcome. It's important to remember that the Commission does have powers to force public authorities to take their responsibilities seriously. We can use enforcement if we need to, if certain authorities appear not to be taking those responsibilities seriously."

newsupdate

Everyone a RADAR winner

RADAR announced the winners of its 2009 People of the Year Awards at a glittering ceremony in London. *Disability Now* takes a look at some of the big winners of the evening



Mike Adams, Chief Executive of Essex Coalition of Disabled People, is presented with the main award of the night, the Person of the Year Award, by Mark Harper, shadow minister for disabled people



Left: Commons speaker John Bercow presents the Doing Access Differently Award to Promote the Vote - Speaking Up. Right: Riam Dean, who successfully brought a DDA case against Abercrombie & Fitch, won the Young Person of the Year Award



Left: Signed Stories - ITV SignPost with the Doing IT Differently trophy. **Right:** The Association of Disabled Professionals take the award in the careers category



Left: Jane Campbell and Roger Berry MP present the Doing Money Differently Award to mental health charity MIND. **Right:** Care services minister Phil Hope presents the care and support award to Cool2Care



Left: The makers of BBC Three's *Otto: Love, Lust and Las Vegas* collect the factual programming award. **Right:** Alastair Campbell and Cerrie Burnell present the fictional programming award to *EastEnders* for their portrayal of disability

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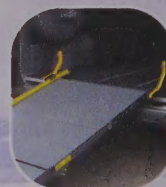
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ruthpatrick

High five – resolutions for the new or old



This is the season for resolutions. As Britain enters the second decade of the new millennium, and a General Election looms, **Ruth Patrick** says it is timely to set out five inherently achievable aspirations on disability for this or the next Government

This column has frequently returned to the need for the Government to rethink its approach to welfare reform and to reconsider the effectiveness of Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) before rolling it out to all disability benefit claimants. Further, as part of the “support” the Government continually promises but less often delivers, it is time for a concerted and sustained effort to dismantle the disabling barriers in the workplace.

Turning to housing, the Government still needs to address the inequities in Local Housing Allowance (LHA), the new benefit for those renting from the private sector. Single disabled people who require a live-in carer can only claim a one-bedroom rate and thus frequently face a rent shortfall. Similarly, families with disabled children are not able to claim a separate room for disabled children should they need it. To resolve this, the Government must pass secondary legislation to



enable more flexibility in the room-allocation for disabled people. This legislative reform is long overdue.

January is a cold month and one where reflections often turn to the costs faced by many disabled people seeking to keep their homes warm. Whilst the elderly benefit from Winter Fuel Payments (WFPs), disabled people are not so lucky. This needs correcting, particularly given the Government's commitment to end fuel poverty for all vulnerable people by 2010, this year! All that is required is to extend WFPs to those in receipt of high-level Disability Living Allowance (DLA) due to mobility impairments. This must be done and soon.

It is now over a year since Gordon Brown pledged to remove prescription charges for those with long-term health conditions. Thus far, this has only been implemented for those living with cancer. Brown should push this up his priority list and seek to ensure that he does not leave office without fulfilling his prescription promise.

Finally, and more holistically, the Government should commit to enabling the genuine participation of disabled people in policy generation, implementation and evaluation. This requires

more than tokenistic consultation and demands appropriate, effective and sustained engagement with disabled people.

These five resolutions represent an achievable agenda for change. As individuals, we will each have our own resolutions for the year ahead but I'd like to make a plea for one more to be added to the list. That is to “carry on campaigning” and working hard to hold the Government to account in its progress towards true equality for all disabled people. A long-term resolution for us all.

→ Have your say

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politics

Frustration over reform failure

The Government has not yet delivered on a pledge to reform a discretionary system for additional housing allowance. As **Sunil Peck** reports, this is having a direct impact on personal choice and independent living



IMAGE COURTESY OF DESIGN MATTERS KBB LTD, SPECIALISTS IN ACCESSIBLE KITCHENS

Campaigners are growing frustrated with the Government's failure to review legislation that discriminates against disabled people who rent privately and who require live-in care or a larger property to accommodate adaptive equipment.

The rules for Local Housing Allowance (LHA) state that a single person, whether disabled or not, is only entitled to housing benefit that covers the market rent of a one-bedroom property. But disabled people can apply for a discretionary payment from their local authority to

contribute to the cost of a larger property.

Campaigners say that officials in the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) recognise that the existing legislation discriminates against disabled people and that, in June, they promised that a public consultation into housing benefit was imminent.

The case for reform of the existing legislation has also been strengthened by a first-tier tribunal that found that the rules for LHA are incompatible with human rights legislation in relation to disabled people who require room for live-in care.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission told *Disability Now* of its concern that a disabled person's right to independent living is being compromised by the existing legislation and that it has urged the DWP to review the LHA.

Linda Burnip, campaign co-ordinator of the Local Housing Allowance Reform Group, says that even though many disabled people are not affected by the existing legislation, the impact on their lives is

significant because disabled people do not know before entering into a tenancy agreement how much they will receive in discretionary payments towards their rent or for how long they will receive it.

"There's one case I know of where someone is in the process of being evicted because they need 24-hour care and a second bedroom and they can't get funding for it. So it can prevent disabled people moving into their own place."

Burnip says that some local authorities only have a small budget for discretionary payments and has heard that one of those may be about to run out.

A spokeswoman from the DWP said the Government intends to publish a wide-ranging consultation paper on Housing Benefit reform shortly that is expected to cover a number of aspects of LHA, including the size criteria and the impact of those criteria on different groups.

In the meantime, Burnip says the Government needs to revise LHA guidelines and give local authorities more funding to cover the additional housing needs of disabled people.

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Live your Life

mediawatch

When the founder of disfigurement charity

Changing Faces, James Partridge (pictured right), appeared on TV screens to read the *Five News* lunchtime bulletin for a week in November it marked the first time a major television channel had given a presenting job to someone with a facial disfigurement.

This, of course, is great news and a big leap of faith for Channel Five. *Five News* was prepared to run the risk of alienating viewers that may have felt negatively about James's presence in front of the camera. But how much of this was just a publicity stunt for the channel or, furthermore, for Changing Faces?

"We don't duck the publicity 'stunt' question because it kind of is one; it's a high profile means of creating discussion and we're not trying to claim it's anything other than that," James told *Disability Now*.

"From our point of view, we wanted to find a way in which we could not be seen as doing something silly just to draw attention to an issue; this is a serious project and I'm not about to go out there and make a fool of myself."

A survey recently



Is the appearance of a disabled activist as a newsreader a breakthrough in disability equality in the broadcast media or just a publicity stunt asks **Cathy Reay**

commissioned by Five News and YouGov showed that 64 per cent of people questioned said that none of them would change channel if they saw a presenter with a facial

disfigurement. Speaking to us halfway through his week at *Five News*, James said he has received nothing but support from viewers: "The reaction has been very positive. I'm really delighted

that we're moving in the right direction and it'll be interesting to see what comes from this."

Channel Five has also promised to conduct further research once James is off-

air, hopefully with the intention of encouraging more disabled people to step in front of the camera.

David Kermode, editor of *Five News*, spoke to *Disability Now* after James's week presenting the lunchtime bulletin. "In over 300 emails we've received from viewers only three of those had negative feedback. Most people wrote that they hoped this would result in *Five News* having more presenters with disfigurements. We've been set a challenge and we need to figure out

what to do next."

The Guardian published figures last month that show the BBC has the highest percentage of disabled staff at 4.4 per cent (Channel Five wasn't tallied, but only one per cent of Channel 4 employees are disabled). Consider then that around 20 per cent of Britain's population are disabled and these figures are suddenly very alarming.

Kermode said: "People can ask: have we done enough? No. But have we done enough to highlight one particularly



prominent issue? Yes, and that's a start."

Gary O'Donoghue (pictured above), disabled political correspondent for

the BBC, said that it's vital all television channels, not just Channel Five, follow this up. "It's great that *Five News* are doing this for a week but I hope that there is something more permanent planned down the line. Research has shown the public don't have a problem with it and broadcasters should do their damn best to reflect what society is calling for."

• For more information on Changing Faces and James Partridge's appearances on *Five News* visit www.changingfaces.org.uk

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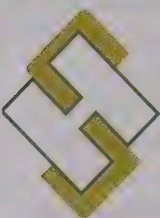
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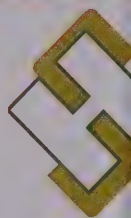
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disabilityrights



Criminal injustice system

A recent case raises concerns for people who have mental health conditions and who find themselves face to face with the police service, says **Professor Peter Beresford**

One of the biggest worries about cases like that of "Catherine", the mental health service user, whose reported rape the police failed to investigate, is that it isn't clear why this really happened.

We don't know whether what's at the heart of the problem is police discrimination or a more general malaise of police incompetence, unaccountability and idleness.

What we can say, though, is that where any of these broader problems exists, it will be those who are least powerful, are least valued and have least credibility who are likely to suffer most and be most disadvantaged.

"Catherine" has now received £3,500 in an out-of-court settlement after launching civil proceedings against the police. She alleged a breach of human rights after learning the attack hadn't been recorded as a crime two months after she reported it. Cambridgeshire police apologised, but didn't admit liability.

Over the years I've heard accounts from mental health service users of police who

have behaved badly when they've been caught out publicly in a crisis, behaving "strangely" or flipping. But I've also heard accounts of enormous sensitivity, kindness, respect and understanding from police men and women, some very much going the extra mile.

On occasion, I've been told that their response has been better than what service users have experienced from paramedics and specialist mental health workers.

But there's a difference between the behaviour of individual officers and how the service is geared up to challenge discrimination and offer help. And here there clearly are problems. Two years ago DITO (Disability Information Training Opportunity) organised a conference in East London

that focused on hate crime against disabled people, including mental health service users. Some participants at the conference referred to the hate they felt they experienced from the police, in addition to hate-crime perpetrators.

However we look at the rape that "Catherine" was subjected to, whether as a hate crime against a

disabled person or a major sexual offence against a woman, the police clearly failed systemically.

In 2008, Shaping Our Lives, the national user-controlled organisation and network, published the findings from a consultation commissioned by the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) on prosecuting criminal cases in which people with mental health problems appeared as victims and witnesses.* Mental health service users consulted expressed "a lot of concern" over the issue of whether a witness or victim was seen as "credible" or not. There was also concern about the police themselves being a barrier that could prevent cases involving people with mental health issues reaching the CPS. They felt this denied them access to a fair and equitable criminal justice system.

The experience of "Catherine" gives weight to their fears. It highlights the need for a new culture of anti-oppressive practice in the police service.

* www.shapingourlives.org.uk/ourpubs.html



SHUTTERSTOCK / BECKY STARES

worldview

Bhopal – a disastrous legacy

On the night of 2 December 1984, some 3,000 sleeping residents were to die in the central Indian city of Bhopal in what was the worst industrial accident in the world ever. In time that staggering figure was to rise to an horrific 30,000 dead. **Rajwinder Sahota** looks back over the 25 years and counts the still rising cost of the disaster



RAGHU RAI/GREENPEACE

The morning after: survivors of the disaster from the nearby Jayaprakash Nagar colony stand in front of the Union Carbide factory one day after it leaked 40 tonnes of toxic gas into the city. Their eyes and lungs have been badly damaged by exposure to the gas.

The personal loss was incalculable. Thirty tonnes of poisonous gas had leaked from ill-maintained equipment at an American owned pesticide factory. The night sky was silently filled with toxic clouds which descended upon the entire township. The death toll was augmented by another 60,000 left disabled; blind, scarred, deformed, burned, stunted, mute and psychologically ruined.

Today, it is a daily routine for victims to crowd into the hospitals for treatment for their ailments. The colossal number of patients reflects the enormity of the catastrophe.

Successive New Delhi governments have struggled to cope with the problems the unique accident has created. NGOs, environmentalists and their lawyers, unceasingly accuse official departments of incompetence, neglect, maladminis-

tration and corruption. One organisation, the Sambhavna Trust Clinic which itself cares for thousands of patients, claims the city's water system remains contaminated resulting in continued health hazards.

Litigation and accusations abound. The Sambhavna's director, Satinath Serangi is highly critical of the lethargy and irresponsibility of officialdom. He reckons the government has not pressed hard enough for realistic

compensation for the gas victims. "Union Carbide should be in the dock and held fully accountable. Their cost-cutting policy on proper maintenance procedures brought about this tragedy. They abandoned established safety measures to increase profits. It's criminal".

Lechobhai is one of those affected. She was fit and young at 30 when struck by the choking gas that dreadful night. Barely able to breath and rubbing her stinging eyes, she found she was blinded. She has been mostly shunned by her community. Her husband occasionally calls by with food for her. With other debilitating ailments she cannot do anything for herself and lies in a tumbledown shed with no blanket or means of comfort. Now 55, she says she wished she had been one of the lucky ones who had died in 1984.

Around the corner Ram Sawroop Sahu, at 33 is still a young man but, unable to move except by pushing himself forward with his hands, is permanently seated on the ground. He was affected by the gas toxins when he was only eight. Ram, like so many other victims, has waited years for his claim for compensation to come to court. No one tells him what is happening, his

mother does what she can to help him.

The factory stopped working but its faulty and rusting pipes and storage tanks still leak poisons. The site has not been cleared and the remaining grotesque skeleton building dominates the skyline.

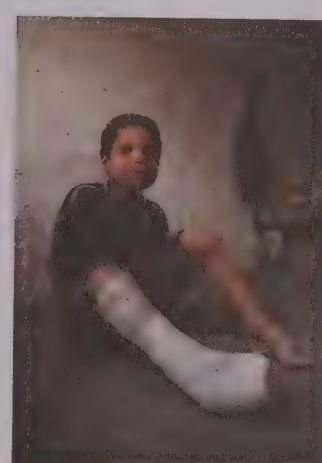
Union Carbide president of Indian operations, American Warren Anderson, fled the country within days of the incident and attempts by the Indian government to have him extradited back from the US to face allegations of culpable homicide and wilful neglect have been repeatedly frustrated by American courts.

Efforts to get the rich multinational into Indian

“She cannot do anything for herself and lies in a tumble-down shed with no blanket or means of comfort. Now 55, she says she wished she had been one of the lucky ones who had died in 1984”

courts have always failed, the company washed its hands of the affair long ago.

Peedit Mahila is one of the organisations who have targeted the derelict Union Carbide factory (site vacated by the company in 1999



Second generation patients showed symptoms which were related to indirect exposure

before selling out to Dow Chemicals) and has plastered the perimeter walls with frank, outspoken anti-American and anti-Indian government slogans. The Peedit Mahila's senior spokesman is Abdul Jabbar and he sums up the Bhopal tragedy philosophically: "Bhopal has been subjected to two disasters, the first occurred in 1984 and the second is the authorities' continued failure to act responsibly in the best interests of the people of this city".

One witness to the events on that historic night was Dr Dolly Chandra, from Bhopal, who is now professor of ophthalmology at the Memorial Hospital. She recalls the choking stench at the time and vividly remembers thousands of people wandering and groping around with watering eyes and intense irritation that was to lead to complications later. "Most

people had the upper layer of the cornea detach and could not open their eyes, leading to photophobia", she says.

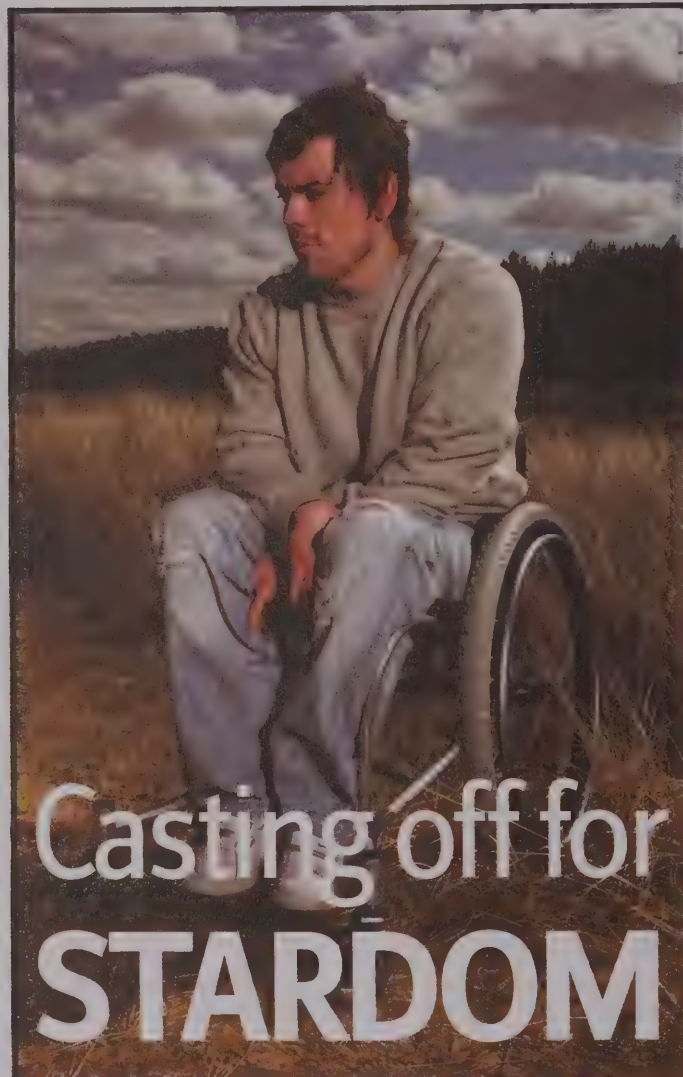
Another doctor, paediatrician Hemant K Dwivedi, worked solely on disaster victims at the Jawaharlal Nehru Gas Relief Hospital for 13 years. Of the children he treated 93 per cent had been directly or indirectly exposed to the chemical fall-out. This invariably brought about respiratory failure with chronic obstructive airway disease, producing narrowing of the bronchi and loss of breath. Many adult victims with these very serious conditions, he observed, committed suicide. He said second generation patients who continued to appear up to the year 2000 showed symptoms which were related to indirect exposure. He added: "Congenital abnormalities of the newly born were likely to

develop three months into pregnancy."

An autonomous trust was set up by the regional Madhya Pradesh government and eight outreach units were developed in 1998. Thousands of registered gas patients receive continuous treatment in cardiology, neuro-surgery, ophthalmology, pulmonary medicine and other areas.

Dr K K Maudar is director of all eight units. His records show the major conditions are chest and respiratory diseases and eye ailments. Eighty senior doctors oversee the specialist departments. He rejects claims that patients are neglected. "We treat thousands of people each year. There is no justification for critics saying patients are disregarded. We are doing all that is possible in the medical field and the accident victims receive the best possible attention", he insists.

onetowatch



Only time will tell whether we'll see more of Peter Marshall following his TV debut in the role of Dan in Channel 4's drama series *Cast Offs*. Answering our ten questions he reveals that he needs his sleep, wants a step-free world, likes two fellow cast members who're proud to be disabled and wouldn't mind playing football again.

What's the best thing about being disabled?

Skipping queues and getting into clubs for free

What makes you angry?

When I go into a clothes shop and menswear is upstairs and they have no lift.

What's the funniest thing anyone's ever said to you

about your impairment? And have you any good putdowns?

"Do you ever go walking in your wheelchair"? It wouldn't be fair to tell you who asked me this...my lips are sealed.

If you were Prime Minister what one thing would you do to improve things for disabled people?

I would make a law that states it's illegal to have steps anywhere!

What do you most like about being on *Cast Offs*?

Being a part of something that's going to change people's perceptions of disabled people forever.

And what do you not like about it?

I missed out on a lot of sleep during the filming. I'm used to getting nine hours sleep a night and on occasions I was only getting five.

Who's your favourite disabled person ever?

My favourite disabled

person would have to be either Mat Fraser or Kiruna Stamell (fellow *Cast Offs*). They are both proud to be disabled and both do a lot of work for the disability community. I am now lucky enough to call them both my friends.

Do you have any special or hidden talent?

That's definitely a question my girlfriend should be answering about me! I play wheelchair basketball in the British super league for my club team "The Knights" and I also play for Ireland.

If you didn't have your impairment, which other one would you like to have for a day?

That's a thinker...erm... probably being deaf, then I could have a day of playing football again.

How would you sum yourself up in ten words or less?

I'm a likeable, easy-going, trustworthy fella!

→ Who do you think is One to Watch?

Send us your nominations for likely lads and lasses who could answer our 10 questions. They can be rising stars in any field of entertainment, business, the media or beyond

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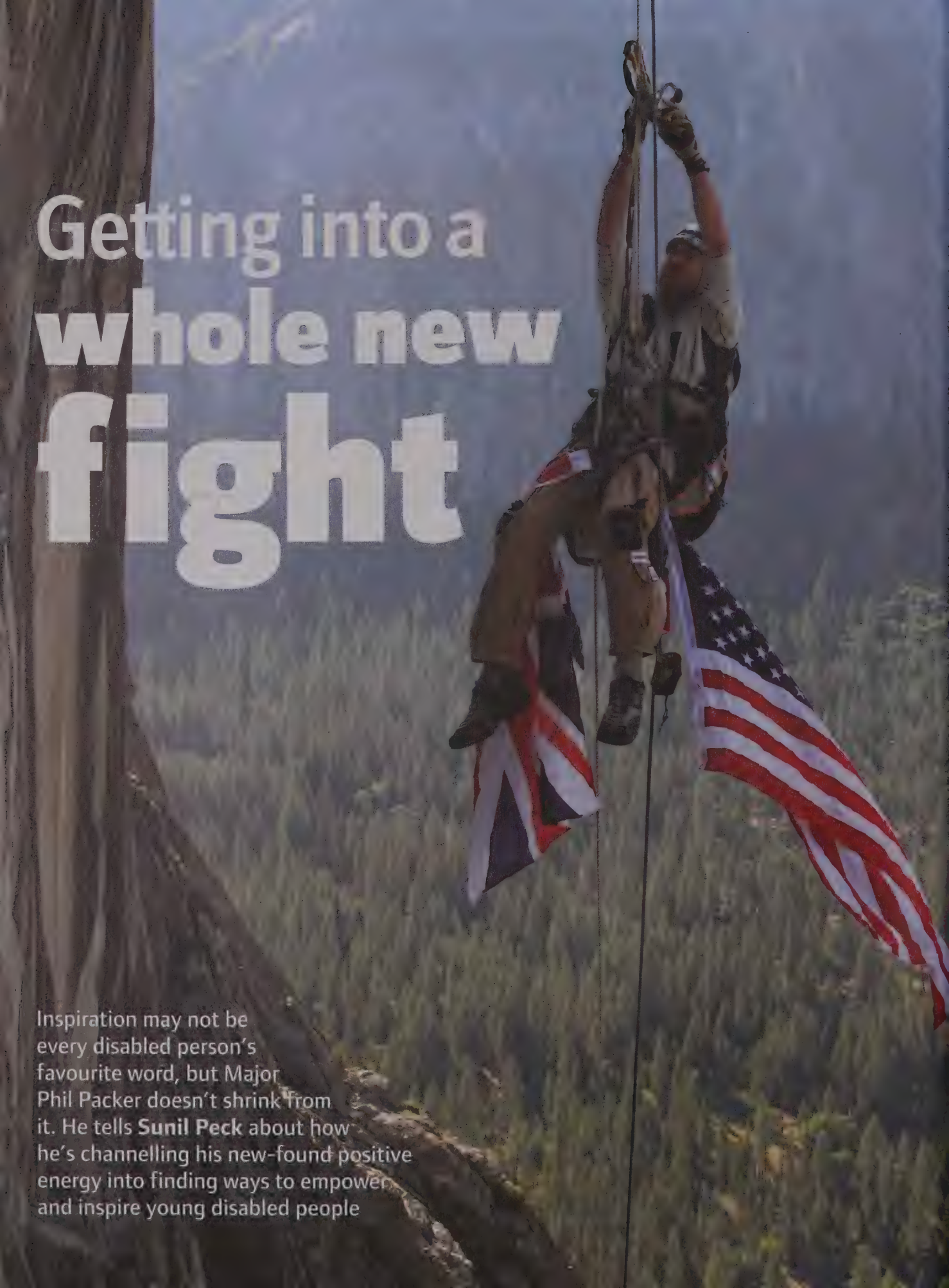
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A man in military-style clothing is rappelling down a rope. An American flag is attached to his harness and is waving in the wind. The background is a dense, green forest on a mountain slope.

Getting into a whole new fight

Inspiration may not be every disabled person's favourite word, but Major Phil Packer doesn't shrink from it. He tells **Sunil Peck** about how he's channelling his new-found positive energy into finding ways to empower and inspire young disabled people

It challenges assumptions that someone who sustained serious spinal injuries from a rocket attack while serving as a soldier in Iraq could count himself lucky. But after what he describes as the dark days, when doctors said that it was highly unlikely that he would ever walk again, Major Phil Packer says that becoming disabled has given him a more positive outlook on life.

"I had quite a bit of energy in what I was doing before, but I feel more channelled now in what I want to achieve and I have a greater understanding of life compared to what I had before I was injured. I've listened to a lot of people in the last 18 months, and heard lots of opinions from people I wouldn't have otherwise spent time with, and I've got a better understanding of the disability community."

He talks with such exuberance about life as a newly disabled person that one almost forgets that he became disabled comparatively recently, in horrific circumstances, after being paralysed in Basra in February 2008.

"I found it very difficult initially to cope with, being in a medical facility when you don't expect to be is always going to be quite difficult.

"Then you look around and see the people that are there with you and it's the people who have injuries that are worse than yours that really make you think, actually, I have a very lucky life. I also think that because I survived and I have a second shot at life then, yeah, on reflection, I want to make the most of it."

Two years on and with the support of the army, doctors, his family and disabled people including elite wheelchair athlete Paula Craig, yachtsman Geoff Holt and adventurer Karen Dark, Phil is determined to do all he can to pass on what he regards



as his good fortune by creating opportunities for others. He is now striving to secure backers for his own charity for young disabled people.

Rather than relying on public donations, Phil wants to attract grants and support from construction and communications companies.

"I feel more channelled now in what I want to achieve and I have a greater understanding of life compared to what I had before I was injured"

"The plan is to build a centre called the British Inspiration Trust where any disabled person between 16 and 25 can come for a residential course and enjoy an experience where they are enthused by other people who are finding success in different areas – business, music, the arts or sport – in their age group. Tanni Grey-Thompson would be a fantastic mentor, she's someone I've admired for many years."

Although he is concentrating on

setting up his own charity, Phil also campaigns on behalf of a number of charities for young and disabled people. His initial campaigning was for injured servicemen and he raised over a million pounds for the charity Help for Heroes by completing the London Marathon on crutches, dragging himself up El Capitan mountain in America and rowing across the English Channel.

Although Phil's decision to raise money for Help for Heroes was motivated by a passion to help other injured service personnel, it also enabled him to keep his link with the military alive while he was exiled in a civilian hospital.

"In hospital, I had this huge void with the men and women I'd commanded no longer around me, near me. So how do you replace that? The only way I could replace that was this fundraising campaign. At the time I thought I was doing it for those servicemen but on reflection I think I needed it as much to get me through those difficult times."

Phil joined the army in 1993 aged 21. He spent four years as a private before going to Sandhurst to train as an officer and was commissioned into the military police in 1997.

At the time of the rocket attack, Phil was in charge of around 120 men and women. He had served in Northern Ireland, Bosnia and Kosovo.

Phil will be leaving the army in early 2010. The decision to leave was a tough one. He still had his sights set on a job with the Ministry of Defence (MoD) months after he began fundraising. Indeed, one of the factors which determined the location of his accessible accommodation was that it was close to the MoD.

But after pushing hard to stay in the military, Phil began to question whether he would enjoy a military





career where his disability would mean that he would be primarily based behind a desk.

"I decided after the marathon just before I went to America in June that I needed to move away from being in the army and because of the people I met during the marathon and also meeting young people with disabilities, I thought that charity work was something I really would like to get involved in more."

The experience of disability is still so new to Phil that he is still learning about life as a disabled person. He likens his situation to a fact-finding mission but is eager to learn as quickly as he can.

"I don't think I ever realised how difficult life could be living with disability. I don't think I knew a huge amount about it because I lived in a world which didn't really have very many people with a disability. I've been very fortunate to have lived a good life for 17 years in the armed forces, and it's meeting people who struggle or find things difficult that I now find unacceptable. So where my values are is that I want to put young disabled

people first and give them the same opportunities that everyone else has. I had a very unexpected year with a very unexpected profile and my mother has always said use it well and that's what my plan is."

Phil has been speaking to scores of young disabled people to learn as much as he can about disability.

But he is yet to encounter any of the

“The things I have done and the things I will do have not been done to send out any negative messages. I'm really sorry if people feel that way”

more politicised campaigners in the disability rights movement.

"I'd be really interested to meet people who have been campaigning for many years because I keep finding out things I never knew before about access, and what's not available. The only way I can make my centre successful is to listen to the people that are experts in the field of disability. For example, people have asked me if I will include non-physical disabilities in its design. That's a new area for me which I've got to get out there and understand."

But what about Phil's campaigning and fundraising methods? Have the marathons, mountain climbing and channel crossings provoked hostility from disabled people, angry that he is



perpetuating an image of disabled people as conquerors of tragedy?

"The things I have done and the things I will do have not been done to send out any negative messages. I'm really sorry if people feel that way. I'm disabled and I want to make the most of life and that is by providing more opportunities and support for other people who are disabled. I wanted to climb El Capitan not because I needed any more money, because I'd reached a million pounds by then, but because I'd met these mountaineers who do work in centres with climbing walls and I think it's a fantastic thing to do. So I'll carry on doing these different sports and if it provides the opportunity for more young people with a disability to try out these different sports, then I think that's a good thing. But if I'm



approaching it in the wrong way and if someone wants to educate me, I'm willing to listen."

There could be more expeditions in the future, but if there are, Phil is anxious that they involve disabled people too.

Phil's other immediate priorities are to find somewhere else to live and a way of earning some money

when he leaves the army.

"This sounds awful, but I wish I was in a position where I was sponsored to do what I'm doing. I want to work on the British Inspiration Trust, do the charity work and make things happen. But by going off to earn money for a couple of days, that's two days when I can't be doing the important stuff.

"If I was sponsored then I could spend all that time making a difference."

It would be surprising if Phil Packer manages to avoid criticism from some disabled people for his use of endurance sport as a campaigning tool for much longer. But any criticism would be wide of the mark and would ignore the fact that Phil has embraced life as a disabled person and is desperate to involve disabled people in his campaign work. ■

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Students on the breadline

Re-organisation of the system which processes additional funding vital to study appears to have left it, and the disabled students who rely on it, close to crisis. **Cathy Reay** reports

The joys of being a student: beans on toast, sneaking onto the bus without paying, working overtime in KFC for the weekend's beer money. The average student has to make every penny of their loan last just to make it through to the end of the week. For most it just means another day of beans on toast. But for disabled

students it's a very different story.

Without necessary financial support disabled students can fall behind, or worse, be forced to drop out. So far this year only one in five disabled students has received the funding they need to pay for specialist equipment and assistance that is vital to their studies, according to a recent Government survey. That funding pays

for notetakers and interpreters in class, specialist computer hardware and software, additional stationery, essential books; expensive equipment and support that is completely necessary for students with disabilities to study and learn in an equal environment to their peers. The responsibility of dishing out Disabled Students Allowance (DSA)

previously ran through local authorities according to where the student was from. However, this year the responsibility of tackling first years' DSA has been folded into one main body: the Student Loans Company (SLC). A company that, at the time of writing, are £43 million down on lending compared to last year. A company that has, a third of the way through the school year, left over 12,000 disabled first year students across the UK still waiting for help.

Suzie Wilkins, a student at Sussex University, has Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome, which affects joint mobility and flexibility and means she has difficulty carrying heavy items like books or a computer. She currently has to use her own money for extra printing and photocopying because she still hasn't received her DLA. "It's a constant cause of worry in the back of my mind. How long will this go on for? Am I going to be reimbursed for the money I'm spending on this? It all mounts up; the more I use of next year's funds, which is what I'm doing right now, the more I worry I won't ever get it back."

Suzie has been told that, like everyone else that applies for DSA, she has to have an assessment so her needs can be determined. But her nearest assessment centre is a two hour train journey away which, because of her condition, is almost impossible for her to take. It's unlikely that she will receive her allowance before the new year.

Unfortunately, Suzie isn't the only one waiting in line. Karim Dakhama, a dyspraxic student at Nottingham University, is still waiting for both his DSA and his student loan. "I applied for my student loan last February and still haven't got it! The banks are very



Karim Dakhama

generous with their interest-free overdrafts but it only really covers my rent, so all my books are borrowed. I have to get books one day at a time at my university library, and I obviously can't write in them. I need to be able to write in and keep my books, I don't

So far this year only one in five disabled students has received the funding they need to pay for specialist equipment and assistance that is vital to their studies

learn any other way, and without my student funding I just can't do that."

Karim says that during the complicated process of applying for a loan the SLC has lost copies of his birth certificate twice, even though he sent them recorded delivery. Abdul Munim Kamali, a dyslexic student at Westminster, has had similar problems:

"After I sent off my first diagnostic assessment it got 'lost in the post', according to the SLC. The second one got there fine but was branded invalid because an educational psychologist didn't carry it out. I eventually had to shell out £350-£400 of my own money for an assessment, which my university will supposedly reimburse me for. After that I'll get my dyslexia 'diagnosis' and be able to apply for an allowance. The entire process is so long."

Whether set back by the system's delays, complicated procedure or unreliability, many disabled students share the same view: the SLC simply cannot cope with the volume of applications it has received.

A disabled prospective student, who wished to remain anonymous, said that while working in his local MP's office at the beginning of the 2009-2010 school year he dealt with numerous complaints from students who couldn't get through to the SLC.

"People would call us and say their new department was understaffed, phones were going unanswered; we had a caseworker in our office who, at one point, tried to get through to the student loans enquiries board and was kept on hold for four hours."

"I spent seven hours on the phone in one sitting trying to get through to a department that was supposedly processing my form," says C Bear Deacon, a Salford University postgraduate who has chronic fatigue and cognitive impairments, who has been waiting for a reply from the SLC for months. She's not asking for the money, she just wants an acknowledgement.

"All I want is someone to process my form. When I eventually get through I get responses like 'oh it's in place

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a/b/c/d who are two/three/four months behind'. There's this huge brick wall: you put a form in, it disappears into the ether and there's no way of finding out where it is."

Warwick University student Stephanie Taylor, who has dyslexia, said that "running late" was a common excuse the SLC used: "I had to keep ringing up to make sure they got my documents okay; it took over a month more than it should have done, which they attributed to 'running late'. Well 'running late' meant that I had to start university without the equipment I needed and even though I have it now, I'm still behind with my reading."

Meanwhile Katie Butcher, a deaf student at Kent University, doesn't understand why, in the absence of her allowance, she can't recharge the SLC for her equipment. "I applied for DSA in April and I still don't have it. I've got a notetaker, which is good, but I don't have a dictaphone or anything else yet that has been promised. I'm putting myself in university so I'm really dependent on this money; why can't I just go and buy a dictaphone or a

“There's this huge brick wall: you put a form in, it disappears into the ether and there's no way of finding out where it is”

laptop and send them my receipt? Apparently my laptop has been delayed because they are awaiting some software, but if they would just let me buy what I need then I wouldn't have to wait."

For many, though, the frustrating wait continues and, thanks to what many attribute to the SLC's lesser expertise in deciding how to dish the dough, some students are being



Above: Stephanie Taylor, below: Katie Butcher



turned down for the allowance. "The SLC is turning down medical evidence at a much higher rate than local authorities ever did," says Amanda Kent, a disabled DSA needs assessor. "It simply doesn't have the knowledge and understanding of medical

It took over a month more than it should have done, which they attributed to 'running late'. Well 'running late' meant that I had to start university without the equipment I needed... and I'm still behind with my reading

evidence needed [to process a claim]."

Amanda told *Disability Now* that students have been diagnosed on the phone in some cases by SLC helpline staff who are completely unqualified to determine a student's needs.

"Disabled students are in an environment now where their applications have become so clogged up in the system that people don't know whether to keep themselves in education or get them out. It's like asking non-disabled students to write and then taking away their pens," she added.

Adam Hyland, the NUS's disabled students' officer, said that it is "disgusting" that large numbers of disabled students are still awaiting their DSA: "Without this support in place, disabled students cannot access their education and reach their academic potential."

When asked to comment on the situation the SLC simply said they were sorry for continuing delays and are doing everything they can. Meanwhile, disabled students across the country face the prospect of end of term exams, coursework and papers they might not be able to complete to their usual standard because of what they see as an ineffective, irresponsible and discriminatory system of support. ■

yourviews

Disabled dog-walkers' freedoms leashed

As a disabled person with a companion dog, not a registered assistance dog, I'm worried about my local borough council's proposal to bring in dog control orders from central government. This will force people to walk their dog on leads on common land and ban dogs altogether in many open areas.

The Government hasn't ordered councils to enforce this. It's just an option. But for some reason a local councillor decided it would be a good idea.

A council officer discriminated against me in front of 200 people and several councillors, by telling me I could walk elsewhere and then saying that assistance dogs would be excluded.

He automatically assumed that people with disabilities have assistance dogs; having a companion dog didn't even cross his mind.

Why should I and others with disabilities and companion dogs be forced to change where we walk just because orders have been introduced that our disabilities prevent us from complying with?

This council officer lacked basic knowledge about disability discrimination, and that scares me. I asked at a meeting if the people

involved had carried out an Equality Impact Assessment, as this is a legal requirement under the Disability Equality Duty for all local authorities when introducing or changing any policies, practices or procedures. Guess what? They hadn't and looked perplexed at the very mention of the assessment.

I love the doggie community. We see past most things, we're friendly to each other (with some exceptions), we have chats in the morning which is a lovely way to start the day, and we know the dogs' names rather than the owners'.

This is a different world from people you meet in the street who ignore you.

For me, this community is a lifesaver. I know these people would assist me if I asked. When my health has been very bad they've taken my dog for walks.

If this community goes, my social inclusion and security goes, because nobody enjoys walking with dogs on leads, it's not good exercise for the dogs and it's no fun because dogs like to play together.

Why do some local councillors want to destroy us? Having a dog has changed my attitude to my disabilities. My dog needs me, and needs me to get up and walk him even when I feel I can't move. When my pain is unbearable he looks at me as if to say "Come on,

Mum, you need to get up."

He's right. I have to get up, I have to exercise him and I have to feed him.

Because of him I don't give in to my health problems: I fight them. He keeps me going, motivates me, and calms me when I feel I want to scream and shout with frustration.

He's there when I wake up in the morning and there when I go to bed at night. I owe so much to him yet he expects so little. He's my assistance dog but he's not registered and the law states he must be registered to be exempt from dog bylaws and dog control orders. It's not right.

**Sharon Lawrence,
Woking, Surrey**



CALINA BARSKAYA / SHUTTERSTOCK

Praise deserved for the Apple of my i

Geoff Adams Spink wrote critically about accessibility issues surrounding Apple's iPhone 3GS in the October edition of *Disability Now* ("Apple's forbidden fruit").

Given that the iPhone was designed for the masses, Apple should at least be complimented for honouring the concept of an accessible mainstream device.

Unlike most mobiles, the iPhone has no physical keyboard. Character input is done via a "virtual" qwerty keyboard displayed on the touchscreen that's quite large compared to others and one I find easy to use. But because it's software-based, it wouldn't be beyond the realms of possibility for disability-specific applications – or "apps", as they're known – to be developed that would address some or all of the issues in Geoff Adams Spink's article.

My experience of owning and using the iPhone 3GS has been an overwhelmingly positive one. For the first time in my life I have access to voicemail and text messages and I'm able to send and receive emails away from my PC.

All this and more from a device I carry in my pocket – something I find totally mind-boggling – especially when one considers that it

wasn't so very long ago that I had to walk to the nearest public phone box each time I needed to make a call!

**Chris Channon MBE,
Nottingham**

Even with public funding, banks still morally bankrupt

The issue raised by Denis Shaw about the way banks discriminate against disabled customers in the insurance cover they offer ("Ask the Experts", *Disability Now*, December 2009) wasn't properly dealt with.

The issue isn't about how some insurers refuse to insure disabled people but about how banks change the way they provide their services without considering the impact this may have on disabled people.

Custom and practice used to rule. Thus, if an existing insurer offered holiday cover at no extra expense, a bank was bound to make sure a new insurer gave the same quality of service.

We, the great British taxpayers, now own most of the banks, so why not ask your bank's chairman to explain any public service anomalies? While you're about it, why not ask him to return your part of the money that bailed him out?

**Norman Taylor,
Neath, South Wales**

How the great and the good are above the law

Ever seen a Deaf or disabled person on the panel or in the audience of *Question Time*, *Bargain Hunt* or *Cash in the Attic*? Ever seen a Deaf or disabled TV presenter, newscaster or weather presenter on the Beeb (apart from occasional appearances by Frank Gardner and Gary O'Donoghue)?

Obviously Deaf and disabled people have no views, don't collect antiques and aren't interested in the weather because according to the BBC we don't exist!

Since February I've been challenging the BBC Trust chairman, Sir Michael Lyons, to do something about this misrepresentation.

Result? Sir Michael isn't interested in Deaf or disabled people! He told me so when he replied that he thought Deaf and disabled people were adequately represented, and that he wouldn't undertake disability equality training or ask his board to undertake any either.

Last March I examined all the minutes provided by the Trust for the past two years: the word 'disability' wasn't mentioned once. I asked how many BBC staff had had disability training in the past ten years and they proudly told me 500 out of 20,000! That's 2.5 per cent!

The BBC has made huge strides in employing black and ethnic minorities and women. Great! But none of them is disabled and disability is common to all excluded groups, so why ignore it? Is it because it's too costly to provide access or is it because of ignorance? The Trust obviously sees us as "Cast Offs" not suitable for mainstream telly, happy to stay on Disability Island!

Sir Michael Lyons should be ashamed of himself. How are we going to get jobs in broadcasting if Deaf and disabled people aren't represented on the BBC. Where are the role models? They don't exist. Do comment, and if you feel as strongly as I do then maybe write an email to Sir Michael at michael.lyons@bbc.co.uk.

Roger Cliffe-Thompson, by email

→ Have your say

- write to us *Disability Now*, 6 Market Road, London N7 9PW
- email us editor@disabilitynow.org.uk



Fighting the battle for rights

Ex-service people wounded in Iraq or Afghanistan face a new set of challenges other than those related to their impairment or condition as they find themselves joining the regiment of disabled people, says **Andy Rickell**

As a disabled activist, I see impairment as a neutral fact of life. Nonetheless, as a right-thinking human being, I wouldn't wish additional impairment even on my worst enemy, let alone someone who chose to put themselves in harm's way in my country's name.

Fate has decreed that thousands of service personnel have become physically, mentally and emotionally impaired and find themselves members of a new grouping they never wished to join – us disabled people.

It's very important that we show full support to our new compatriots for the battles they will face.

I'm particularly concerned about them being landed with two labels disabled activists loathe – “victim” and “brave”.

Anyone who suffers in war is a “victim” of war. But we need to avoid that label being applied to disabled service personnel, as that can immediately be detrimental.

The first instance of that

The armed forces is one of the few places where it's not illegal to discriminate blatantly against disabled people. It's good to hear of instances where disabled soldiers are kept on, and it would be good to hear of a change of heart from the military and a real commitment to judge all disabled personnel who want to serve on what they still can do effectively

will be the decision about continued military service – the “we're sorry you became disabled on active service but you can't now continue in your chosen career” decision.

The armed forces is one of the few places where it's not illegal to discriminate

blatantly against disabled people. It's good to hear of instances where disabled soldiers are kept on, and it would be good to hear of a change of heart from the military and a real commitment to judge all disabled personnel who want to serve on what they still can do effectively.

The other obvious instance of being treated as the “victim” is attempting to take up a new career or life in civvy street, where disabled ex-service personnel will face the discriminatory attitudes of employers and society that the rest of us who've been disabled for longer have faced.

Negative experiences such as these could make disabled individuals take their “victimhood” personally, undermining self-esteem. We must support them, realise that disability and the treatment

they experience is not their fault, and give them a new positive identity – social model thinking.

Bravery is indeed what these people have shown – rationally putting themselves in harm's way for others. But the “brave” epithet applied to disabled people allows society to treat us differently, and often indifferently – “you're so brave to cope”, etc. This can excuse society from providing proper personal support, both for the individual in coming to terms with new circumstances, and in overcoming the barriers that all disabled people face.

Disabled service personnel need to be supported by those organisations that work with them, specifically to be put in touch with the networks of disabled people in society at large that support one another in addressing the barriers we face.

Whether ex-service personnel or not, we should stand shoulder to shoulder with each other.

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Motoring and Transport

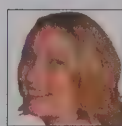
HELEN SMITH

Works with Mobilise and specialises in car matters

What's a good little car?

Q Please can you recommend a small car (Agila, Matiz, Micra, etc)? I need a high seat but don't need special adaptation. Also any seat cushions that I can use to raise myself up, or can you recommend any good websites for any of the above? I get very dizzy having to scroll through and do lots of searches, so I'd really appreciate any help with this.

Helen Birkett, by email



Helen Smith replies:

There are lots of small cars on the market but ones that Mobilise has had good

reviews from our members about include the Berlingo, Citroën Nemo, Multispace, Nissan Note, Renault Kango and Vauxhall Agila. My advice is always to test-drive the vehicle you like first and also try similar vehicles. It's difficult to recommend one vehicle over another, as my experience shows that what might suit one driver will not suit another. There really is no substitute for personal testing.

On the subject of seat cushions, many of our members use Putnams, where you can buy a cushion to raise you up. Visit their website at www.putnams.co.uk or email info@putnams.co.uk.

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Can I get funding to enlarge a small room?

Q My son uses a four-foot-six wheelchair and a ventilator. We want to extend his bedroom but the council says the room is big enough. What legislation is there on room size for disabled people with bulky equipment?

Name supplied, by email



Kate Sheehan says: There are no formally laid-down standards

for different room sizes in a home. The new Draft London Housing Design Guide stated in September that a single bedroom should be no less than 8.4 square metres, and 12.8 square metres for a double, but didn't indicate any sizes for wheelchair-users.

The British Standards Institute (BS8300: 2009) has a section on accessible bedrooms (used mainly for hotel development and

costing £240 to download) that doesn't indicate overall sizes, but does state that there should be "clear minimum space" to allow a wheelchair-user to gain access to one side of a bed and that turning space should be no less than 1.5m x 1.5m.

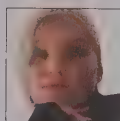
I'd say the best guide, though, is the one put out in November for housing associations by the Department for Social Develop-

How can I look up phone numbers on my computer?

Q While I find the 195 Directory Assistance number very useful for finding telephone numbers, it would also be handy to have an online alternative. Can your technology expert recommend any sites for looking up phone numbers that are

accessible to a range of adaptive technology solutions? I remember there used to be something you could have installed on your computer called the BT Phonebook, but I always had difficulty using it with a screen reader.

A Hillman, by email



Léonie Watson replies:

The BT Phone Book is not great to use with a screen reader, but it's possible. The form fields aren't labelled well, so it's hard to know what should be entered into the form, but fortunately, it's a fairly short form. The first field asks for a name; the second asks for a location.

Directory Enquiries also has a website, but it suffers from the same trouble as the BT Phone Book. If you don't mind hopping in and out of forms made with your screen reader, it's usable, though, and the options are a bit more detailed.

The BT Phone Book and Directory Enquiries both let

you also look up business numbers. Yellow Pages has a business numbers website too, but has the same form label trouble as the others. Another option for business numbers is Thomson Local. The form is simple and works well with a screen reader. So there are choices available, but you'll need to be nimble with a screen reader.

BT Phone Book

www.thephonebook.bt.com/publisha.content/en/search/residential/search.publisha

Directory Enquiries

<http://www.ukphonebook.com/index.php?cd=tels>

Yellow Pages:

www.yell.com

Thomson Local

www.thomsonlocal.com

The screenshot shows the ukphonebook.com website. At the top, it says 'ukphonebook.com'. Below that are links for 'Home', 'My Account', and 'Log In'. A message states: 'Register to search for UK phone numbers and more online. Sorry, you've exceeded your allocation of free phone number searches for the day. You'll need to register to carry on using the service. Once you've registered you'll get another 5 free daily credits to use today. You can also buy extra credits, which can be used for telephone, address, and electoral roll searching...'. There is a form with two fields: 'Your full name' and 'Your email address'.

ment in Northern Ireland (DSDNI). In addition to other advice, it suggests:

- Bedrooms usable from a wheelchair should provide for a wheelchair turning circle of 1.8m diameter;
- A clear space of at least 1.8m should be allowed for the assisted transfer from a wheelchair onto the bed;
- At least 800mm should be allowed for carers on non-transfer side of the bed;
- A clear space of at least 1350mm should be allowed to approach, reverse and

pull out drawers or wardrobe doors;

- At least one metre should be allowed to approach furniture with knee spaces suitable for wheelchair use;
- Clear space of not less than 800mm be provided at the base of the bed for wheelchair circulation.

Occupational therapists are key in this area and their assessment should take into account the individual needs of the client. In your son's case this would mean the size of his wheelchair and

what he needs to be able to use his bedroom. If he can't access it or transfer from the wheelchair onto the bed, with or without assistance, then the space is not enough and a grant could be sought to make suitable changes.

If this assessment has already taken place and no help is being offered, you

can always complain to the Social Services Department and ask for a second opinion from an independent source.

British Standards Institute

www.bsigroup.com/DSDNI

www.dsdni.gov.uk and enter "wheelchair housing design" in the search box

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Olympic standard meddling



Amidst apparent secrecy surrounding a decision to re-admit some people with intellectual disabilities to some Paralympic events, **Peter White** wonders if it isn't time to put the athletes more in control

Sports administrators do somehow give you the impression that they've never cheered a goal, saluted a smash, or stood spellbound at the breaking of a world record. You wonder why they ever got involved in sport, since it only seems to be the rules, and the paperwork, rather than the result that turn them on.

I suppose after covering four Paralympics, I've just spent too long at what I obviously mistakenly thought was primarily a joyous sporting occasion, watching endless discussions about exactly how far a competitor could move their left arm, or precisely where their spinal lesion occurred, and whether that really disqualified them from being in this or that race or game.

Clearly, accurate classification in Paralympic sport is vital: what is not clear, is exactly why these debates should be had in the middle of an event, when these things should have been sorted out long before the starting-gun went off.

In Beijing alone, at least two medals had to be

withdrawn after having been awarded, because classifications were deemed to have been wrong; and in one case, a wheelchair race was rerun following a crash. None of this is the fault of the competitors. They go to these events in good faith, expecting that the claims that the Paralympics are elite sport will mean that they will be run to elite standards.

One of the problems facing the Paralympics if it

genuinely wants to be regarded as an elite event, is how difficult it is for the public to understand the number of classes there are in the same event; and how someone can cross a line first, yet not end up with the gold medal. The journalist's role, I always thought, was to try to explain some of the murkier waters of the Paralympics, and try to shed a little light. However, having recently been in Kuala

Lumpur, trying to follow the twists and turns of the debate over re-admitting athletes with intellectual disabilities into the Games, I was puzzled to find reporters, myself included, barred from debates, even the sessions which were advertised as open.

It seems to me that a little more democracy, taken for granted in almost any other areas of disability politics, needs to find its way into the Paralympics. Surely it's time that the athletes who so often find themselves on the wrong end of some baffling decisions, should be taking a much greater part in bringing the show into the 21st century.

ed cetera

The dwarf propelled, quadriplegic, 100 metre hurdles wasn't quite the success the International Olympic Committee had hoped for.



guestcolumn

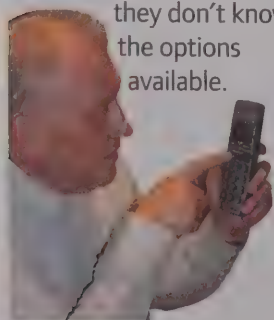
Selling out on independence

Sources of impartial advice, or one-stop shops for your support needs? **Frances Leckie**, editor of www.independentliving.co.uk thinks that the move by some independent living centres from advice and assessment into selling is misjudged

Independent Living Centres (ILCs) – familiar to us all, as helpful places where you can view a range of daily living and mobility aids, and find out what really suits your needs, without any commercial angle. The one environment where not only is there no pressure to buy, but actually no way of buying.

Except that isn't true any more. Without much debate, it seems that a number of ILCs have turned themselves into shops. I find this difficult to understand, particularly as the entire *raison d'être* for an independent advice centre is to provide independent advice. As soon as the people giving the advice are also selling products, it is no longer independent.

Individuals visiting an ILC are often doing so because they don't know the options available.

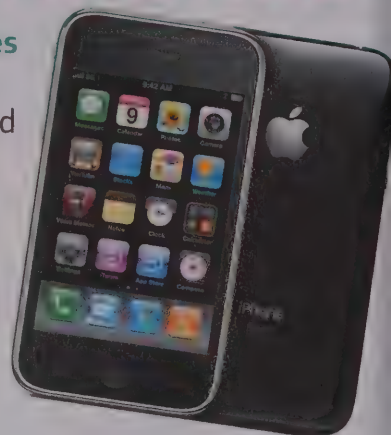
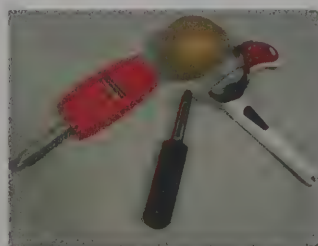


However well-intentioned the staff at a centre where products are sold, they cannot possibly be giving impartial advice: they may well say that there is no pressure on people to buy, and that if the visitor is not happy with what they have for sale, they refer them to other stockists, but that is not the point. Inevitably, the customer will be swayed by the selection that has already been made by the expert they are consulting. It may not even occur to them to ask about other possibilities.

It would be fair to say that most ILC staff are opposed to the idea of having to sell, believing that it would undermine their role as a source of independent

advice. But I have also come across keen advocates of the principle, whose position is that ILCs are staffed by professionals who would never dream of selling something that was inappropriate for the user, and therefore it is better for them to make a sale, rather than leaving it to a mobility retailer who may be more focused on profit than probity.

I think they are making my point for me. As a commercial organisation, you are obliged to consider things like profitability. And the manager of an ILC with targets to meet is bound to find themselves selecting products that they know will generate profitable sales, rather than displaying



a range that could address more needs, but might include some expensive pieces of equipment for which there is little demand.

I am not suggesting that ILCs will turn into retail sharks: there are very many businesses already involved in this market who are entirely ethical, and would never dream of selling to a customer who hadn't been properly assessed, and whose needs they could not meet.

What we all need is for ILCs to do their job, not to try and take over another role which is already being well fulfilled by existing professional suppliers.

• See pg 51 for **Tried and Tested**

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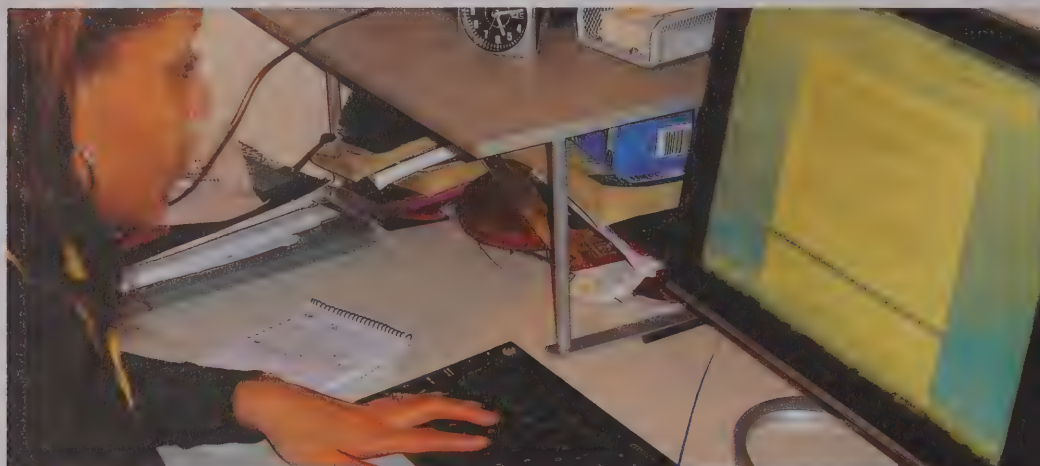
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Claiming the right to write

Halfway through university, **Tiffany Joseph** was told she had dyslexia. Since then she's discovered that her condition is the one thing she has control over and that it's other people's attitudes that prevent her fulfilling her dream



Is there any room for a dyslexic journalist? I've always enjoyed writing and from a young age decided I wanted to be a journalist. I didn't do particularly well at school and was told by my teachers that I wasn't capable of pursuing an academic career.

I left school with just two GCSEs: one in English and the other in Art. Five years of secondary education and that's all I had to show for it: two GCSEs that couldn't get me into college or find me a decent job.

I felt I was capable of a lot more and hoped to take several A levels when I left secondary school but having only two GCSEs meant I couldn't. I remember telling my teacher what I wanted

to do and she laughed at me. She said: "I don't think so my dear. You'll have to take a foundation course in Health and Social care." I was too upset to reply and walked away, head bowed, and began to cry.

The next day I went straight to my local college and enrolled to re-sit four GCSEs. After a year my tally of GCSEs had gone up to five, giving me access to the A levels of my choice. I took three, gained an A and two Cs and decided to enrol in a university degree course in Communications and Sociology.

Still dreaming of becoming a journalist I got work experience in the industry and kept ploughing away at my vision.

Although I enjoyed writing and knew I wanted to write for a living, I found it a big challenge and I felt it becoming harder each time I tried constructing a meaningful sentence. I found myself struggling to string words together and spell correctly. When essay-writing became too difficult too often I got concerned and started to feel there was something intrinsically wrong with me.

Where was my ability to write and learn and develop ideas coherently?

I knew something was holding me back and I wanted to find out what it was. I decided to seek professional help and booked an appointment with the university

disabilities centre. To my dismay, but hardly to my surprise, at the age of 23 I was diagnosed with dyslexia. My frustration with writing was now explained.

I consider myself to be a creative person but I know it takes more than that to become a journalist.

Dyslexia is a learning disorder that manifests itself as a difficulty with reading and spelling. But in the world of journalism a journalist who can't spell is regarded as like a car without petrol: useless.

It's not that I can't spell because I can, it's just that I'm not particularly great at remembering how to spell particular words.

Knowing I'm dyslexic hasn't deterred me in any way from being a journalist. It's my persistence and faith that have seen me through to this day.

People have a misconception about dyslexia. They think you can't write if you can't spell.

Three years ago I graduated in my first degree. I've gone on to complete a postgraduate diploma in broadcast journalism, as well as a string of work placements.

At 26 I'm still struggling to get my foot in the door. The opportunities exist but I guess they're just not intended for dyslexic candidates.

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Once again, 'tis the season to be jolly" and you've been invited to your work party, your partner's company do or a friend's mulled-wine evening. You've been to such an affair before and you've seen *The Office*; you know there's a likelihood of colleagues coming more out of their shells than is entirely necessary and openings for alcohol-induced questions including the ubiquitous and oh-so-charming: "Were you born like that?"

I'm ashamed to say that I've even been tempted to pull out the "disabled card" (poor access/sore back/carer unavailable etc) to avoid such festive gatherings. However, anyone who's seen *A Christmas Carol* knows that if disabled people make themselves visible at this time, the able-bodieds can heed Marley's warning, turn their lives around and avoid purgatory...so, let's party!

My number one top tip is: be seen and bedazzle. Now is the perfect excuse to ramp-up the glitz to strobe-lighting-effect-proportions by wearing glitter and anything shiny.

Fortunately sequins are very "on trend" this autumn/winter so shops are full of clothes that gals can razzle-



Fight for your right to par-tee

Party season beckons and the pressure is on to follow the Beastie Boys' call to arms but, before you reach for those flashing antlers, **Lara Masters** has some tips for surviving the Yuletide festivities with style (and a disability)

dazzle in, and guys will look sexy twinkling discreetly in dark coloured shirts with fine glitter pinstripes and ties with subtle shimmer (Burton's do great glitter shirt/tie combos in black or deep red for £28).

Sparkling at festive bashes not only attracts the attention of that special someone (unless they are visually impaired in which case you will have to rely solely on your sparkling wit) but also ensures canapé-laden catering staff cannot overlook you, even if your disability means you are of less than average height.

Tip number two: make un-PC behaviour work in your favour. If the waiter/waitress happens to patronise you, play up to it by grinning lots and acting like you've never tasted those delicious bite-size treats before; this way you will always be served first and

encouraged to take several.

My third tip is what I term: Spac-itude. This is simply disability confidence; feeling good about your individuality and being physically

If the waiter/waitress happens to patronise you, play up to it by grinning lots and acting like you've never tasted those delicious bite-size treats before; this way you will always be served first and encouraged to take several

"different" even at those challenging times. It's a helpful tool to employ when your partner's boss/friend's new boyfriend/complete stranger



approaches (possibly entranced by your glittering get-up) and whilst gnawing on a turkey drumstick splutters: "Can I ask you something?" Then without waiting for an answer proceeds to slurringly pry into the minutiae of your "condition".

It's usually a good idea to be polite, particularly to your partner's boss, but you don't need to explain your disability to anyone, especially someone with such a gross lack of social skills. You can say as little or as much as is comfortable and it's perfectly acceptable in this situation to "borrow" a disability which renders you unable to converse verbally (i.e looking blank/faking some BSL). However, if they start to sign back, you will have to temporarily blind them with some shiny garb and make a swift exit.

Tip number four seems obvious but I have to remind myself of it on regular



occasions: know your limit. The Christmas party period is long, and sensible pacing when imbibing is a must. Yuletide parties are awash with free alcohol and strange hybrids such as eggnog, mulled wine and "Snowballs" but "getting into the Christmas spirit" should not be taken literally.

I have learnt, repeatedly and painfully, that my tippie quota should not exceed three drinks over the course of an evening. Counting your drinks and knowing when to stop is imperative to

successfully surviving the silly season. You may see other disabled people knocking back the liquor with gay abandon and think "well, if it's okay for them..." however, on closer inspection you'll discover that they are not disabled at all, they are just very drunk.

If you have a disability, a small amount of the hard stuff may improve your symptoms (relax spasms/minimise tremors/ease muscular pain), but exceeding your alcohol limit will create Christmas chaos for you and your carer/assistance-dog/significant other with possibilities of tinsel entanglements, mince pie mishaps, bauble blunders and a myriad of festive fowl-ups.

My final tip is by far the most important and should be followed even if all the above are blatantly ignored: have a rockin' good party season! ■

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Lapland: in search of **Santa**

Why wait for the man in the big red cloak to come down the chimney? **Martin Bull** discovers that you can meet him on his own ground by visiting Finnish Lapland and taking a reindeer-hauled sleigh ride

Stepping out of a plane that's almost at squealing point with excitement into a blast of Arctic air comes as a shock. But soon we're whisked away from the airport by sleigh, kitted out in snowsuits and boots, to a secret location.

Snow-covered pines stand like sculpted figures against the atmospheric "grey light". This is the only daylight in December – between 10am

and 2.30pm. Otherwise, it's dark, but it all adds to the magical atmosphere, with log fires and lantern-lit forest paths straight out of a fairytale.

This is Lapland, Europe's biggest wilderness. Like the thousands of wild reindeer that roam across it, it respects no boundaries, covering northern Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia. But the Finnish part is the legendary home of Santa Claus. So what can you

Did you know?

700,000 letters arrive for Santa each year in Rovaniemi, and all receive replies.

expect from a day trip to meet him?

All-inclusive day trips to see Santa Claus leave from several UK local airports (depending on the trip chosen), so you get the maximum amount of



Did you know?

The Santa Claus legend came about in the 18th century, when Dutch mariners spread the word in New York – but it was Saint Nicholas – “Sinter Klaas”. From then on, Americans caught onto the idea and depicted him as an old man dressed in red with a long beard. When children asked where he lived, the answer was, “the North Pole!” The real St Nicholas was the 4th century philanthropist bishop of Myra (modern Turkey) who gave gifts to poor children.

the most popular tourist destination. Almost on the Arctic Circle line, at 66 degrees, (you get a certificate to prove that you have crossed the line as you travel north), it is the Santa town – 365 days a year. Just a few minutes’ drive from the airport is Santa’s Village, Santa Park, souvenir shops and (the new) Santa’s Post Office. But with the large number of tourists passing through, you don’t get a private meeting with Santa.

For something more “authentic”, including a private family meeting with Santa, and personal gift, specialist tour operators Canterbury Travel offer trips to smaller, uncommercialised centres in beautiful surroundings throughout Finnish Lapland, with direct flights from the UK. Arriving at Enontekiö airport, with a sleigh ride to the little village of Hetta for lunch, you can try out all the activities, and learn to drive a snowmobile across a frozen lake, with a visit to a specially made snow castle. Canterbury also offer a one-day trip to the original North Pole Post Office (flying to Rovaniemi), where the elves sort the post in an underground toy workshop. An individual meeting with Santa is included, and you have time for all the outdoors activities.

COURTESY OF FINNISH LAPLAND TOURISM

time in Lapland. Flights leave at around 7am and return by 10pm.

Outdoor activities include reindeer, husky, snowmobile and sleigh rides which are similar in most locations. It’s a fun-packed day, and we got the chance to try out all these, with time for snowball fights and hot drinks in between. I thought the reindeer rides were the best. Being pulled along at a gentle pace through a fairytale

landscape by one of these docile creatures, snow settling on its antlers like tree branches, is just fantastic. It takes up to five years to train a wild reindeer to pull a sled, but only five minutes to see why this is Santa’s legendary form of travel.

Venues differ enormously in atmosphere. It depends what you are looking for, so check what’s on offer. Rovaniemi, the modern ‘capital’, is





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FINLAND TOURISM



KAISA SIREN



COURTESY OF FINNISH LAPLAND TOURISM

If you decide on a longer stay, Luosto resort is in a lovely setting. Flying to Kittilä, you can stay in a hotel or log cabin with a one-night option to sleep in an igloo, and possibly view the aurora borealis, the spectacular Northern Lights. I have seen this phenomenon as early as October. A

Did you know?

Sami herders still wear traditional reindeer skin boots with the fur left on, because it's the best protection against frostbite.

ghostly curtain of white light wafted across the sky. It can also be green or red. It happens when solar particles collide with the Earth's magnetic field. In Sami mythology, the Northern Lights are the effect of the fox swishing his tail, disturbing the soft snowflakes, as he makes his way through the Arctic night.

Lapland is a remote, adventure trip location, and some tours may not be suitable for wheelchairs. Canterbury say that although local staff will help to make the day a great success, there are no special assistants. Adapted

Useful Tips

Temperatures can plunge lower than -20C, so wear layers of clothes, and you'll need to take hats, gloves and scarves in addition to the all-in-one snowsuit that is provided on arrival.

The currency is Euros. Change money before you go – it saves time. Limited facilities are available in remote locations.

Factfile

Canterbury Travel's fully inclusive Lapland Spectacular one-day trip starts at £440 - adult; £420 - child (4-11 years); £400 - child (2-3 years). Limited free child places available on early bookings.

Luosto hotel, log cabin or overnight in an igloo, to Kittilä 3 nights from £1,197 per person inclusive (child reduction: £100). Children under 2 years: free.

Contact local travel agent or Canterbury Travel. Tel: 01923 822388 or 0845 1252752. www.santa-holidays.com

Late offers from: www.rediscover.com (agents).

Cosmos Winter 'One Day' Land: from £459 (adult); £412 (child 2-12 years). Tel: 0871 423 8414 or local travel agent. Special needs advice line: 0870 423 8548. www.cosmos-holidays.co.uk/lapland

First Choice Lapland: 'Search for Santa' from £389 - adult; £349 - child. Tel: 0871 200 4455. Special needs advice line: 0871 664 0143. www.firstchoice.co.uk

Further information: www.visitfinland.com/uk; www.laplandfinland.com; www.visitrovaniemi.com

vehicles and specialist equipment such as harnesses on rides are not included in the price of the trip. Contact them for advice on the best options.

Larger tour operators, such as First Choice, who offer day trips to see Santa, an igloo and Sami shaman storyteller, and Cosmos, with all the usual activities, both flying to Kittilä, have special advice lines where you can



discuss individual requirements.

When the big moment arrives and the children are finally taken to meet Santa Claus, it's about the only time during the whole day when everything goes quiet. They're in awe of him in these surroundings. The kindly old man with the long white beard is everything they imagine, and magically, every child gets a gift from a list that they wrote back home,

bearing their name. So he's the real one.

Parents often keep the kids guessing until the last minute about what's going to happen on such a trip, and even where they are flying to, but my friend's five-year-old had it all worked out beforehand. He solemnly told me, "Lapland is a house where Father Christmas lives. It's a secret place where he gets the presents ready. He lives in the Christmas world."

But this Christmas world exceeded even his imagination. ■



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Are you the parent of a young child with cerebral palsy and don't know where to find the right support or advice?

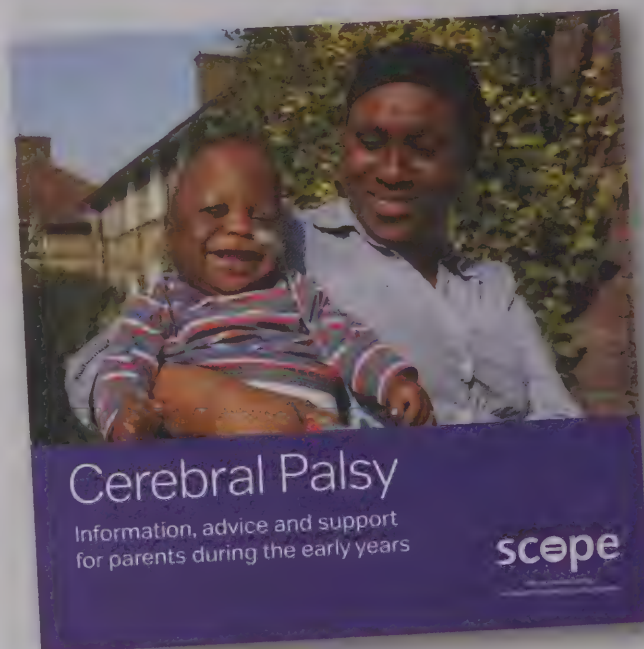
A new free guide for parents of children with cerebral palsy containing a wealth of practical information and advice has been produced by Scope Response.

The compact guide offers parents of children who are under five, comprehensive information on a range of issues related to supporting a child with cerebral palsy. The guide includes:

- information, tips and support on cerebral palsy
- practical tips to guide you through the early years of your child's life
- advice on dealing with the wide range of professionals involved in supporting your child
- an A – Z guide to defining the terms and medical language you may come across
- a CD that has lots of ideas and tips for games all children can play.

“The most important thing to remember is that as the parent you are the expert about your child.” Parent

The guide has been developed with disabled people, parents and professionals that work with disabled children.



It has been produced in direct response to parents of disabled children that Scope Response works with, who have highlighted how important it is for them to get accurate information, especially around the time of diagnosis for their child and in the early years.

Parents who would like a copy of the guide should contact Scope Response – a free information, advice and support network for disabled people, their families and the professionals that work with them.

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Most mobile phones seem like futuristic toys for hyperactive children and most landline phones seem like relics of a past age. **Ray Bellisario** (right) finds two new models that buck both trends

Help me, information

EMPORIA MOBILE

Here's a phone for people who don't like the ever-smaller, facility-packed mobiles that manufacturers think we all need. It's the Emporia, and it doesn't have all the new-fangled add-ons that serve no useful purpose for older and disabled folk who may not be so adept at coping with confusing gadgetry.

I'm colour blind, have poor sight and weak, arthritic hands, and get the trembling, involuntary shakes of Parkinson's, so the top of the range mobiles that I usually use are wasted on me.

The Emporia is slightly larger than most compact phones on the market yet still slips easily into the pocket and it's not any

heavier. The extra overall size cleverly serves the most important purpose of any



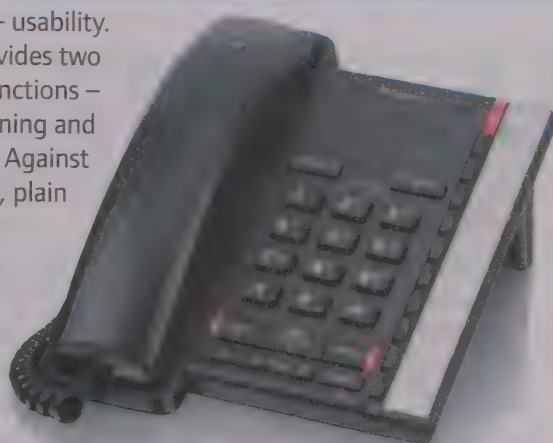
phone – usability.

It provides two main functions – telephoning and texting. Against a bright, plain orange screen, large black figures and letters stand out vividly for easy reading. Numbers on the time display are nearly a centimetre high. Absent are all the obscure icons that usually clutter up the screen. Absent also is the range of options minutely displayed on most menus.

In fact, the menu has completely disappeared, which eliminates all the fumbling you get when searching for a feature. Instead, you access the functions from a few clearly-marked buttons on the side.

For the hard of hearing, there's an extra-loud loudspeaker, compatible with hearing aids, that reduces whistle and extraneous feedback.

Most impressive is the size of the keys: amazingly, six keys of my current mobile fit into the space of one Emporia key. It's purpose made for an often overlooked sector of the market.



BT CONVERSE 2200

This is a landline phone with basic home facilities. It can sit on a table or be fitted to a wall, and comes in grey or white. Laid out spaciouly, it has easily identifiable buttons and keys, making it easy to use.

It comes with all the features of other good phones: redial, a very effective volume control and amplifier, hands-free, secrecy and ten one-touch memory buttons for speedy dialling.

Audio clarity is superb and makes it an excellent replacement when the time comes to throw out an old or broken phone.

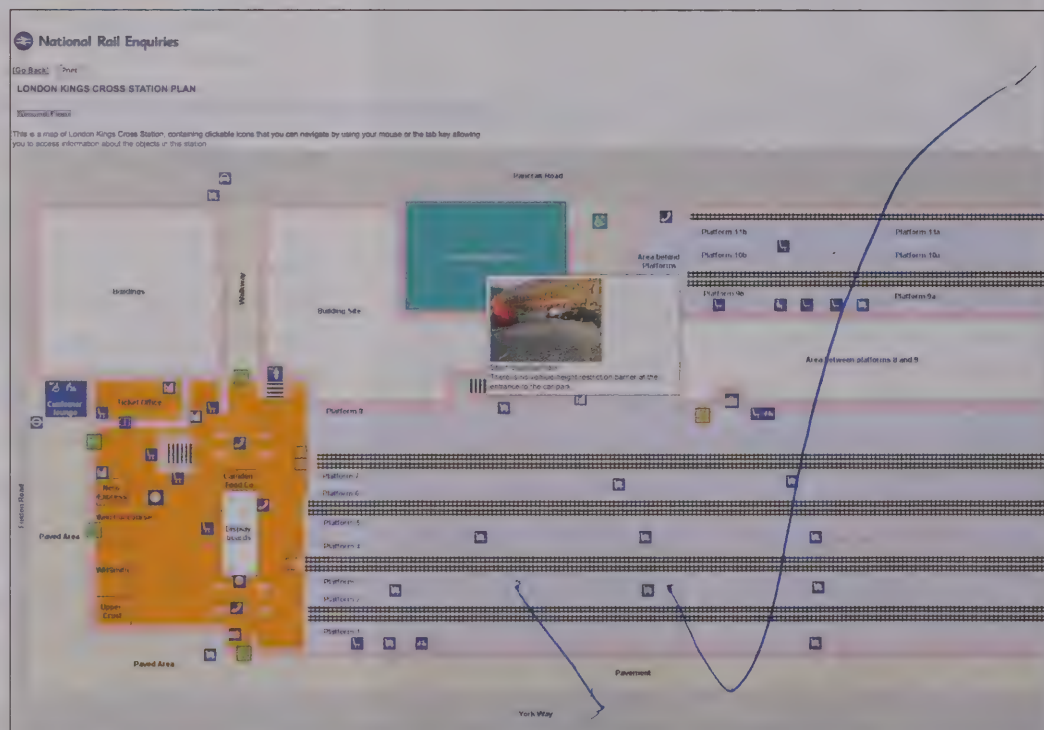
INFORMATION

The Emporia TALK-premium costs £104.99 inc. £5 airtime from TalkMobile (www.talkmobile.com or tel. 0844 854 0838). BT Converse costs around £35 from usual retailers. Info: 0870 240 5029.

Help is now at hand:
Stations Made Easy, a new
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Picture this - trains without strain

Travelling hopefully may be all well and good, it's arriving to find you can't get out of the station when you get there that can bring a journey to a sticky end. **Cathy Reay** reports on an online initiative that could keep you on track



London Kings Cross rail station: Stations Made Easy's detailed aerial station overview outlines the accessibility of all features in and around mainline train stations, including car parks and shops and outlets in station buildings.

National Rail, the Association of Train Operating Companies (ATOC) and the Department for Transport (DfT), launched online this month and is designed to help disabled people plan their journey through stations.

Over the course of a year, 700,000 individually taken photographs were compiled for an exhaustively comprehensive step-by-step, photo-by-photo online directory of every rail station in the UK. Stations Made

Easy offers everything from toilet accessibility information to whether the ticket office has low counters, to lots of photos of each section of a station from every angle so passengers can assess

whether they can access the facilities they need as they plan their route, eliminating any chance of a mid-journey crisis.

David Sindall, head of inclusion and accessibility at ATOC, said: "This is about giving disabled people the opportunity to make an informed choice. We don't want people to think, 'oh I can't possibly use that station, I can't travel'; part of the debate is that a lot of stations are not [currently] accessible to people in wheelchairs but there are far more disabilities to consider."

The Stations Made Easy website markets itself as a tool not just for those with mobility issues but for people with a range of

The tiny two-platform stations in the Welsh valleys or Norfolk plains still have lots of catching up to do

disabilities, such as learning difficulties and visual and hearing impairments. For example, it shows where there are induction loops or

visual aids inside station buildings. "We've been able to give people almost individually tailor-made information so disabled customers can work out what works for them and what doesn't," said Sindall.

Although it is an ongoing (and seemingly everlasting) project to make all stations in the country fully accessible, the good thing about the Stations Made Easy site is that it will continually update itself as and when a station's accessibility is improved or gets new features. As David Sindall says: "It's about

people getting more confident about using rail, about people being prepared to give rail a chance; what's the point of having accessible trains and stations without being able to let passengers know about those benefits?"

• To access Stations Made Easy visit www.nationalrail.co.uk, click Stations and Destinations, input the station you'd like information for and click on the Stations Made Easy feature. It is also available on most local rail company websites.

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Paralympic ban lifted



The Paralympic governing body has ruled that athletes with “intellectual disabilities” will once again be in contention in a limited number of events reports **Paul Carter**

Athletes with learning disabilities will be allowed to compete in the Paralympic Games in London in 2012 after the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) voted to overturn a nine-year ban.

Athletes with what the IPC term “intellectual disabilities” (ID) were suspended from all IPC sanctioned competitions following a fakery scandal at the Sydney Paralympics in 2000 after an undercover Spanish journalist, Carlos Ribagorda, revealed that he had played on Spain’s gold-medal winning ID basketball team for two years, and that

ten of the 12 squad members had no form of disability.

He said that amongst the squad were several players who played regularly for non-disabled teams, and as a result all team members were subsequently encouraged to grow beards and wear hats to avoid being recognised.

He claimed that only minimal checks of the athletes’ abilities were made by the governing bodies.

Following a lengthy and vociferous campaign against the ban by the International Sports Federation for People with an Intellectual

Disability (INAS-FID) and several learning disability charities across the world, the IPC decided to reinstate ID athletes at the organisation’s general assembly in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Athletics, rowing, swimming and table tennis are the sports now expected to be included in the 2012 Games in London, although a formal schedule for competition has yet to be finalised.

Bernard Atha, chairman of UK Sports Association for People with Learning Disability said that a “great

wrong” has been put right.

ID athletes wishing to take part in future competition will be subjected to a rigorous two-tier classification process which will include reviews of an athlete’s medical files, as well as on-site testing that will focus on “sports intelligence”, along with sport-specific tests.

Although the new ruling comes into effect immediately, inclusion of ID athletes will initially be at the discretion of individual International Federations while they become “operationally ready” for

the new classification system.

Bob Price, President of INAS-FID, said: "Naturally, I am delighted with the outcome of the vote. Even though they themselves did nothing wrong, for nine years since Sydney 2000, ID athletes have been excluded from the Paralympic Games and other IPC sanctioned competitions."

"This resolution brings this unfortunate episode to an end and re-introduces ID athletes to their proper place within the Paralympic Family.

I am hugely grateful to the Joint Working Group and its associated research teams and I look forward to seeing ID athletes competing on the world's stage in London in 2012."

Tim Reddish, Chairman of ParalympicsGB, the British Paralympic Association, welcomed the IPC decision.

He said: "We have lobbied hard for the re-inclusion of athletes with a learning disability, subject to a robust classification system, and are delighted that IPC and INAS-FID have got us to that point."

Mencap, which has campaigned vigorously for the reinstatement of ID athletes, also celebrated the decision to lift the ban.

However, it warned that unless funding is made available athletes would not be ready to compete at the London 2012 Games.

Mark Goldring, Mencap's chief executive, said: "Everyone at Mencap is delighted that after years of campaigning, athletes with a learning disability will no longer be excluded from the Paralympic Games. However without

immediate funding, British athletes will remain excluded from London 2012 despite the ban being lifted. This would be a national embarrassment."

Sir Philip Craven, president of the IPC, said that the move was the result of a "unique and excellent co-operation between sports governance and the scientific community".

"I wish all ID athletes the best of success in their attempt to set world class performances at future competitions," he said.

"Since sorting out my will, I have absolute peace of mind for Michelle's future."

Sally, Michelle's mum



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entertainmentnow



Not in the frame

From Jamie Foxx's portrayal of a schizophrenic homeless man in Hollywood's awards season favourite *The Soloist* to Sam Worthington's paraplegic ex-Marine in James Cameron's blockbuster *Avatar*, disability has been represented by some of the most influential director-actor combinations of the year. But, says **Cathy Reay**, directors continue to favour non-disabled actors

Nine of the 60-odd films I have seen this year have featured disabled characters. This sounds great on the surface, but consider that none of those characters were played by disabled people, and it isn't such a brilliant accomplishment.

And in most cases these actors either play a negative stereotype of or completely misrepresent disabled

people in the process.

Avatar, a film that has been 12 years in the making since director James Cameron's last opus, *Titanic*, stars Hollywood heart-throb Sam Worthington as Jake Sully, a paraplegic former Marine. Jake is recruited to travel to a fantasy world called Pandora in order to save Earth's energy crisis. But he has to do this by becoming an "avatar", a

computer-generated blue species that can walk, run, jump, swim, climb; all things Jake can't otherwise do.

So, Jake has to save the world and in order to do it he simply cannot be disabled.

On this side of the pond they do things a little differently. *Bunny and the Bull*, a new British film from the makers of *The Mighty Boosh*, centres on a character called Stephen (played by

Edward Hogg), with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), the result of an event which is retold during the film in the form of his flashbacks. The actor doesn't have PTSD, but he's quite convincing at playing out a stereotype: hallucinations, obsessive compulsive disorder and agoraphobia all feature. In several of his hallucinatory episodes, Stephen imagines his friend Bunny telling him to "stop being a freak", to "snap out of it", and eventually Stephen reaches a climax where he forces himself to go outside, and suddenly all his problems vanish. If only life was that easy! Not only does *Bunny and the Bull* subliminally enforce the idea that Stephen is "weird" but it



From left to right: *Avatar*, *The Soloist*, *Adam*, *Bunny and the Bull*, *The Imaginarium of Doctor Parnassus*

also shows very limited understanding of a condition that the filmmakers have no experience of.

How different can it be when disabled actors take on roles?

Danny Boyle's British film set in the slums of India, *Slumdog Millionaire*, features blind actor Siddesh Patil as the character Arvind, who is shown begging in an underpass. The short scene is used to explain a cultural practice in certain parts of India and is done in a respectful, sensitive way. It would have been great if Siddesh had been able to play a character that isn't just about being blind but at least Boyle tried to make sure that viewers didn't pity the boy, just understood the

situation, and using a person that's actually blind to do that made all the difference.

It is a shame that other directors didn't take his lead. Earlier this year Twentieth Century Fox released *Adam*, a film about a young man (played by British actor Hugh Dancy), who has Asperger's syndrome, struggling to find love. Not only was the film incredibly condescending towards people with Asperger's, given it was entirely about the condition it seems ridiculous that the role of *Adam* should be played by someone that doesn't have it.

It's a similar tale in *The Soloist*, which was released last month to major critical acclaim. It is expected that Jamie Foxx will clean up at

the Oscars for his portrayal of Nathaniel Ayers, a schizophrenic homeless man discovered by a local journalist who realises – despite his schizophrenia – how talented Ayers truly is. Unlike the others *The Soloist* is actually based on a true story. So presumably a person that has direct experience of schizophrenia could just as easily fit the role. Then why, again, are the Hollywood alumni getting first dibs on roles they know nothing about?

The biggest film to have come out of Hollywood this year that actually features a disabled person is *The Imaginarium of Doctor Parnassus*, which stars short-statured actor Verne Troyer as Percy, who is part

of a travelling circus. But is this really the only way disabled actors can be taken seriously, by demoralising and demeaning themselves in such horribly tagged roles? Verne should be able to play the lead, or the baddie, to be popular, to "get the girl".

The number of films starring characters with a disability has shown that Hollywood is ready to tackle the issues but the roles are still being wrongly cast and stereotyped. This will continue to happen unless studios are prepared to, firstly, let disabled actors play disabled, and non-disabled, characters and secondly let them represent disability in a positive, not derogatory, way.

FESTIVAL

DaDaFest 2009 Liverpool

Shining through unprecedentedly wet and foul winter weather, Liverpool's DaDaFest 2009 lived up to its reputation for showcasing amazing creations: everything from highlighting the bright future of young artistic talent in the World Museum exhibition, the scintillating burlesque of Millie Dollar, Mat Fraser's barrier-breaking act *Freak to Clique*; and challenging discussions on sexuality.

The swirl of creativity and lack of obstacles was a joy. Once you've experienced *Unshakeable*, Paul Betney's story of life with Parkinson's and those little yellow pills, Laurence Clark's *Spastic Fantastic*, and the "Late at Tate" arts party, you wonder what to do for fun, inspiration and the sheer hell of it the rest of the year.

Some moments go on resounding for days, like being brought up short in *Resistance*: one of those times when you have to confront the "what" and "why" of our lives. This exhibition, by Liz Crowe, of film, photos and voiceovers of disabled people in a Nazi euthanasia programme trod a fine line between sensationalism and truth, brutality and reality, but did so with



incredible control. I was left with a voice that echoed in my head long after I'd left: "What's unfair is that we think the world's being unfair is normal."

Leigh Stirling's guitar playing at DaDa Noise was an incredible sensory experience. Stirling's ability to squeeze virtuosity and emotion as well as flamenco, sitar and drum effects from the same guitar, made the floorboards and tabletops dance. His witty and angry lyrics ("Don't look at me like that, Like I've got swine flu!") were superb, perceptive and unfortunately true. They really hit the mark.

Two telling tales stood out in the *Magic Hour* series (photo, above) of five films by disabled people. In *Atari*,

a boy rails at his constant companion, a computer that doesn't even have games with guns. The ending is predictable but no less heart-rending as his kidney dialysis computer saves his life.

Then in the larger-than-life *Hands Solo*, the king of porn with the Midas-touch fingers is guaranteed to turn any female into a quivering mass of orgasmic joy with a flick of his incredible rotating wrists.

Kevin Connolly reprised last year's show with photos from 31 cities worldwide. His view, from a few inches above the ground, is mainly

a crazy forest of legs, blatant stares and puzzlement where even a baby coos in amazement at Kevin speeding along legless on a skateboard.

Was it all good? While the venues were excellent, the signage could have been better, both inside and out. Liverpool is a big city and in inclement weather, I'd guess some gave up trying to find remoter venues. Some acts crossed the line and battered rather than persuaded but overall I loved DaDaFest 2009 and look forward to 2010.

Susan Bennett

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worklife

Karen has the bow-WOW factor

I trained to be a social worker in 2005 but my tutors said I wouldn't be able to cope with the paperwork and pressure because of my dyslexia.

Then I found a job with Portsmouth City Council for six months but when the temporary contract came to an end I was stuck.

The idea of setting up Four Paws Aqua came to me because my labrador, Chum, had broken his leg twice and the vet had recommended hydrotherapy for him. But the nearest pool was 25 miles away and there was a six-month waiting list.

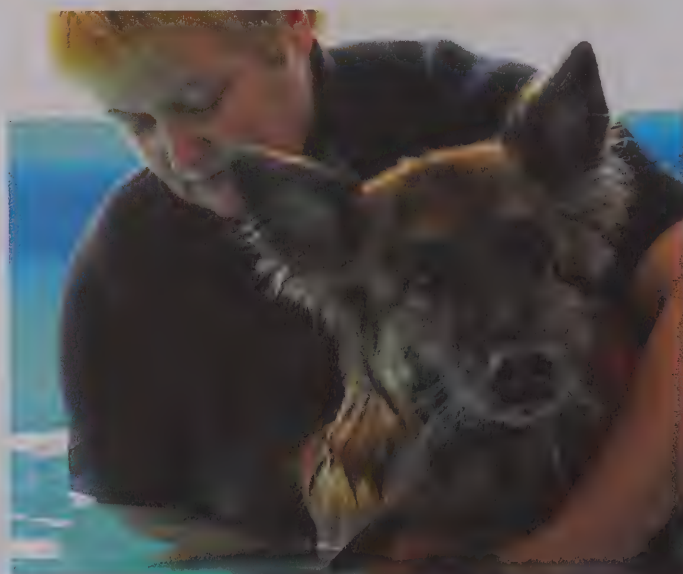
I had to find the money, the premises, the pool and the customers. My mother helped me do some leaflets and I took them to all the local vets and pet shops, but the bank wouldn't lend me any money because it thought the idea would never work.

People started ringing up asking when I was opening and where the pool was. It was unbelievable.

The pool is in a business unit and comes up to my waist. Chum comes to work with me nearly every day.

The dogs have a shower in the doggy shower; then I put a life jacket on them. Some dogs run into the

Karen Standen was told by her bank manager that her idea for a hydrotherapy pool for dogs would never work. Four years on, her business is growing with hundreds of pooch owners splashing out



LISA REEVE

pool, others need more persuasion and some need to be hoisted in.

When I'm in the pool with a dog, we do swimming and exercises. The water is warm so it eases pain, stiffness and swelling, and improves joint mobility and muscle strength. A typical session lasts half an hour.

I see all sorts of dogs: big ones, little ones, overweight ones. One dog that comes in on Wednesday afternoons got so crazy when she first arrived and saw the pool through the window that she tried to jump through the glass! We now have to

draw the curtain before she visits.

There's a lady who comes in with her King Charles spaniel on Saturday mornings and loves getting in the pool with her dog.

I started off with 47 customers and now have about 400. We've started doing grooming, we've got

a physiotherapist and we've just taken on a lady to do dog walking. Because of all this extra work we're having to move to bigger premises.

I hate doing paper work. I have a lovely volunteer who does things like write letters to vets. If I have a document I can't understand, I usually ask my husband or PA to read it and explain it to me.

I don't like writing emails either because I know it shows lapses in my grammar. I also hate working with figures but I found a good cashflow program on the web that explains everything in colours, so I'm fine with that because it's easy to use.

I think this business would be suitable for any disabled person as long as they have passion and get-up-and-go. But they'll need to like dogs and water.

• **For more information see fourpawsaqua.co.uk. Karen Standen was talking to Sunil Peck**

KAREN STANDEN: CAREER PATH

- 1978 – Left Purbrook Park School and did several factory jobs
- 1983 – Began working as a care worker with disabled people
- 2003 – Started training as a social worker
- 2005 – Worked for Portsmouth City Council for six months helping young offenders
- 2007 – Started Four Paws Aqua

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WANTED

SOS, A KIWI heading to the UK for Christmas is in need of an insulated accessible caravan. The caravan must have a wet area shower and a toilet as well as 2 beds (for both myself and carer). The caravan requires a ramp or a hoist, as I cannot lift my feet very high at all. The caravan would be parked up at my brother's place in Woking in Surrey, and used on the roads other than delivery etc. As we are not sure of our itinerary as I love all 4 countries of the UK, but I guess we may head up to the highlands of Scotland, up Inverness way at some stage, so any assistance with accommodation, of any sort, in any area, as long as there is a wet area shower, (would only need this every second night), toilet and very few steps. Into the future a wee bit, when I finish

work in a year to 18 months, I would be very interested in a) a house/car swap, which would be in Dunedin in the South Island of New Zealand or b) for a person I can stay with, who could show me around their country and, in return, I would show them around the South Island of New Zealand. Tel: **00 64 3454 2463** or email: ibby@kol.co.nz

MY DAUGHTER WANTS to go clubbing in Ibiza and I am finding it very difficult to find any information on accommodation. What I am looking for is a hotel which is wheelchair friendly and has suitable bathroom facilities situated near a night clubbing area, preferably with a pool and near a promenade. Alternatively, self catering could be an option. My daughter has to take a great deal of equipment with her for her care so we would need to hire a vehicle which will take four people plus my daughter and her equipment (incl electric wheelchair). Have you had a good experience which you can pass on to me or are aware of somewhere that might be suitable, please ring me on: **01502 515191**.

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We have been warned about a scam involving people from overseas who say they want to buy a product and who offer to pay using cheques, Western Union money transfers and certified cheques. Although no *Disability Now* readers to our knowledge have been hit by this, please be particularly wary of accepting cheques from overseas. For more information, visit the Metropolitan Police website.

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For further details please contact **DEBBIE WESTMORELAND** or **JESSICA LEWIS** in the School of Sociology and Social Policy at the University of Leeds, LS2 9JT.

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PROJECT MANAGER & ADVISORY GROUP MEMBERS

PROJECT MANAGER (freelance)

1 day p.w., £250 per day, to Oct 2012

Closing date: 12noon, 8 Jan 2010

Interviews in Folkestone w/c 11 Jan 2010

CORE ADVISORY MEMBERS (5 positions)

12 days per year to Oct 2012, £2,500 annual stipend

Applications considered from 8 Jan 2010 and closed once all posts are filled.

Full details at www.screensouth.org

To receive the application pack in an alternative format or an informal discussion please call our retained HR consultants on 01303 256 240.



Traffic Planner Bus Station Controller Financial
Assistant Engineer Apprentice HR Consultant Project
Manager Travel Advisor Receptionist PR Officer
Customer Services Assistant Health and Safety Advisor
Marketing Manager Tube Driver Programme Manager
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Help us achieve disability equality

EQUALITY 2025 – NEW MEMBERS

Equality 2025 is a non-departmental public body which advises government on how to achieve disability equality. All members are disabled people. To build on the good progress made since its establishment in 2006, we are now re-focussing its role as a high-level advisory group. It will offer Ministers and senior government officials strategic advice on policy developments to support the life chances of disabled people. Members will act as ambassadors, raising Equality 2025's profile and promoting effective stakeholder and cross-government engagement in a range of settings.

The Office for Disability Issues wishes to appoint up to four new members. We want disabled people with the drive to make a difference and who can make a valuable contribution to government policy development. You must have excellent influencing skills and be capable of securing the trust of Ministers and senior officials while retaining your independence.

You must also have experience of working on boards or committees in the public, private or third sector.

For more information on these important roles, including details on how to apply, please visit www.veredus.co.uk quoting ref 9980, <http://publicappointments.cabinetoffice.gov.uk> or www.odi.gov.uk

For an informal and confidential discussion please call: Katie Yeo on 020 7932 4237 or Shelagh Szulc on 07795 827384. Textphone: 020 7932 4222. Email: amber.vye@veredus.co.uk

The closing date for applications is 10am on Friday 29 January 2010.

As part of the Department for Work and Pensions, the Office for Disability Issues is committed to providing services which embrace diversity and promote equality of opportunity in our working practices with all of our customers, colleagues and partners.

This advertisement and the application pack are available in other formats.

VEREDUS



DWP Department for Work and Pensions



Office for Disability Issues
HM Government



equality2025
Working with government
for disability equality

DN DEADLINE - February 2010 published 26 January.
Classified deadlines: Booking: 4 January. Copy: 6 January.

RECRUITMENT

South East Coast Ambulance Service **NHS**
NHS Trust



South East Coast Ambulance Service responds to 999 calls from the public and urgent calls from health professionals in Kent, Surrey and Sussex. Additionally, we provide non-emergency patient transport services (pre-booked patient journeys to and from healthcare facilities) in Kent and Sussex. The Trust values diversity, equal access for patients and equality of opportunity for staff. We are committed to providing a service which is accessible to everyone regardless of age, disability, gender, ethnicity, sexuality or region/faith.

There are more employment opportunities within the ambulance service today than ever before. These include:

Emergency Call Operator
Emergency Resource Dispatcher
Emergency Care Support Worker
Management & Professional Support

Qualified Paramedic & Technician
Paramedic Practitioner
Patient Transport Service
Critical Care Paramedic

For details of our current vacancies
please visit www.secamb.nhs.uk



We are proud of our diverse workforce and aim to fully represent the communities we serve.



HOLIDAYS

Airdeny Chalets – Taynuilt, Argyll

Brand new 4 star chalet in small chalet park set in a peaceful natural habitat with spectacular views of Ben Cruachan and Glen Etive. Wheelchair access, en-suite bedroom with wet shower. Sleeps 6.
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Email: jenifer@airdenychalets.co.uk
Web: www.airdenychalets.co.uk



Llandeilo, West Wales

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Tel: 01558 823 059. Web: www.vacationcottageswales.com

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- All cottages have lifts and profiling beds.
- Hoists in the bathrooms of three cottages.
- One cottage has a level entry shower room (wet room).
- Spacious living area and kitchen, in larger cottages wheelchair access throughout.
- For an internal view of any cottage please visit our website: www.mellwatersbarn.co.uk

Rates: £100 to £360 per cottage per week, depending on size of cottage and season. Short breaks also available. Prices include linen, heating, electricity etc.

Mellwaters Barn, East Mellwaters Farm, Bowes, Barnard Castle, DL12 9RH.
Tel: 01833 628181 Fax: 01833 628020
Email: mellwatersbarn@aol.com Web: www.mellwatersbarn.co.uk

Disabled Access Holidays



Puerto Pollensa - Majorca
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for full details please visit...

www.dah-europe.com
Tel: 0845 257 0113

HOLIDAYS

Algarve Carvoeiro

Spacious private villa with pool and hoist overlooking golf course. 3 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms including wheel-in shower. Totally level throughout. For more information call

**Debbie Wells on
01277 354313**

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www.selfcateringinwales.co.uk

OR TEL/FAX 01570 470275

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Near to quiet beaches and unspoilt Western Lake District.

Level access, lift, wheel in shower, grab rails, floor and ceiling track hoists, electric beds and shower chair.

Rates according to size of group and season. Short breaks available. Prices inclusive of bed linen and heating/hot water.

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Please contact Maggie for colour brochure on **01229 772849**,

Manor Farm, Kirksanton, Millom, Cumbria LA18 4NW

or visit www.manorfarmholidays.co.uk

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- 24-hour emergency service provided by qualified male and female nursing staff
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- Wheelchair accessible transfers and tours

**Disabled Access
Holidays**

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- Portugal
- Tenerife
- Cuba
- Egypt
- Florida
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Brochure 01579 320344
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Portreath - Cornwall

Tastefully converted luxury 5 star barns on the breathtaking North Cornish Coast. Full wheelchair access, en-suite bedrooms, level entry shower. Sleeps 2-6. Short Breaks available. A warm welcome guaranteed. Tel: Lynne Drew 01209 842317.

www.higherlaityfarm.co.uk

HOLIDAYS

EILDON HOLIDAY COTTAGES

Melrose, Scottish Borders
Dingleton Mains, Melrose TD6 9HS

Winner of Holiday Care Service award for the best self-catering accommodation for disabled people in Britain.



Six award-winning, modern, self-catering holiday cottages. Five of the cottages are Tourism for All Category 1 (unassisted wheelchair access). Access is easy and level throughout. In each of the cottages there is at least one bedroom with shower room or bathroom on the groundfloor. Two of the cottages have hoists, and one of these is kept "allergy-free" (no smoking, no pets, feathers etc). Both disabled and able bodied guests will be equally comfortable. Open all year. Walking, fishing, cycling, golf. 40 minutes from Edinburgh.

Apply: Mrs Jill Hart Tel/Fax: 01896 823258

Website: www.eildon.co.uk
email: info@eildon.co.uk

Rates: £294 to £777 per cottage per week (depends on size of cottage and season).

Short Breaks available



DORDOGNE – SW FRANCE



Two stunning wheelchair accessible properties in the idyllic rural setting of Perigord Vert.

La Grande Maison sleeps up to 10, La Petite Maison up to 5. Contact **Ed Passant** on **01233 731097**

or ed@accessholidays.com

www.accessholidays.com

Norfolk Cottages

Small self catering complex in South Norfolk, private swimming pool with hoist, spa & sauna. Five tastefully restored cottages with many features for the less able that sleep from 2 -10. All cottages have wet rooms and ground floor bedrooms.



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www.norfolkcottages.net
Tel: 01379 658 021

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HOLIDAYS

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Tenerife – Los Cristianos

Electric adjustable bed with cot sides. Heated pool with hoist. Ramped access. Mobile hoist for transfers to bed. Three bedrooms, sleeps up to six people. Wheelchair adapted vehicle and twenty minute transfer from airport available. Also air conditioning, washroom and English terrestrial television. Local web advisor speaks English.

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For further details Tel: 01788 846241
or visit www.48jadecottage.co.uk



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See www.theukweb.com/disabledholidays
 or call **01274 588142**

backlash



Deck the Paul...

An ill-advised seasonal trip into London's West End has convinced **Paul Carter** that he's no toy boy

According to that song that goes "tra la la la" a lot, this is, supposedly, the season to be jolly.

For the most part, I agree. It might surprise you to learn that I actually like Christmas a lot – it's the only time of year when eating, drinking and the wondrously vague "being merry" are actively encouraged.

There's one part I don't like though – shopping.

Case in point, I tried to get into Hamley's the other weekend. It was an experience I can only imagine being similar to attempting to stuff myself into the back passage of a well-fed rhinoceros.

As I've documented before, I don't have a particular fondness for children, so in retrospect, attempting to visit the world's most famous toy shop wasn't the best idea. There are lots of them there you see. Not only does the sound that more than six of them together make



DMITRY SHIRONOSOV

physically turn my blood to vinegar (I measured it) but they tend to find me more

“I don't have a particular fondness for children, so in retrospect, attempting to visit the world's most famous toy shop wasn't the best idea”

fascinating than Santa, Rudolph, and all the elves combined. Not ideal.

I like to imagine to myself that backstage (or whatever it's called in

shops), I actually caused some sort of kerfuffle, with managers and security staff running around panicking that I was distracting the children from badgering their parents into spending vast amounts of money.

My timing could have been better too. Visiting on a Saturday less than a month before Giftmas was idiocy in the extreme. You see – and I'm not just talking about toy shops here – something about this time of year seems to bring out the worst in people the second they have a shopping bag in their

hands. The very same people who will no doubt be volunteering in soup kitchens for the homeless and setting up gaudy festive displays on the front of their houses suddenly turn into kitten-kicking, elderly-elbowing Noel nightmares when they brave the stores.

I've not gone as far as setting up a spreadsheet or anything, but I reckon I get elbowed, shoved, knocked and barged more often at this time of year than across the rest of the year put together.

As a result, I shop online now. At least that way I can reinforce my own smugness about not coming home battered and bruised like all the other poor sods who have braved it. The drawback to shopping online though is that my standard of presents has to be higher. I can no longer blame the fact I bought my 11-year-old nephew some cat food on the fact that it was the only part of the shop I was able to get to before suffocating. Damn you internet and your extensive product ranges.




Information
for disabled
people

Directgov

Advice that's
easy to find

Directgov



www.direct.gov.uk/disability

Directgov is the website to visit for the latest information and services from government. It's clearly written, useful and the information is all in one place.

There's a large section for disabled people covering:

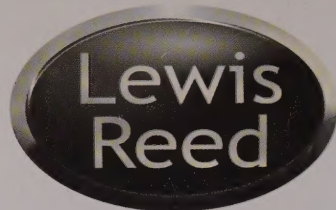
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- ➡ financial support
- ➡ disability rights
- ➡ employment
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Have you used Directgov? How did it help you find information and services? Would you like to share your Directgov experience so that others can benefit too?

We are looking for people who would like to tell their Directgov story. Email your story to odi.communications@dwp.gsi.gov.uk and you could feature in our next ad!

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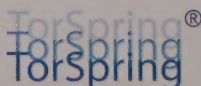
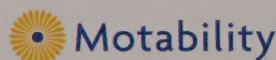
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